

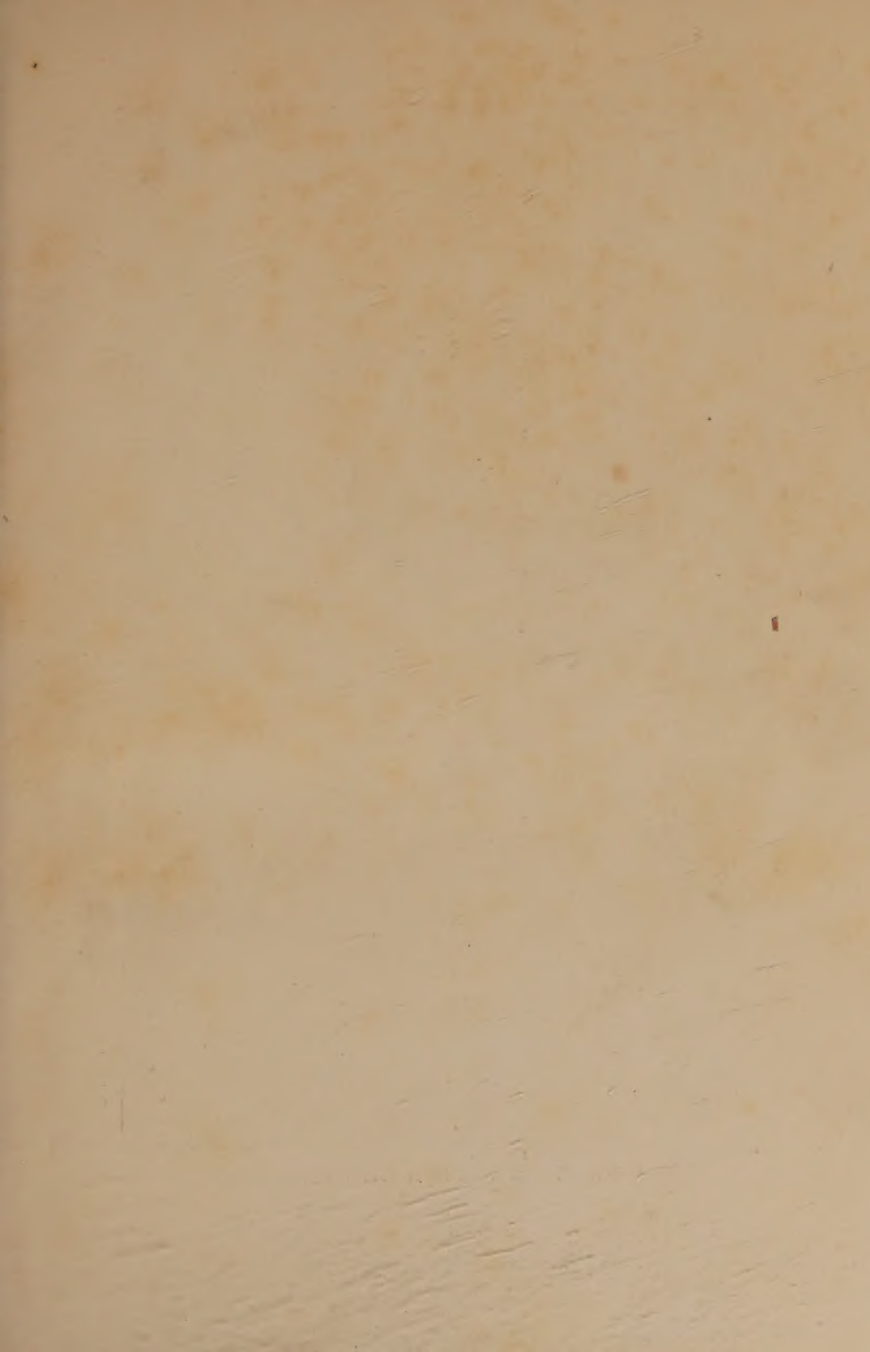
A HERO OF LUCKNOW



CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON



A Hero of Lucknow





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"HE CLUTCHED AT THE MAN WITH BOTH HANDS"

A Hero of Lucknow

A Tale of the Indian Mutiny

BY

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CHAPTER I

The Major's Nephews

IF the sahib will but lift his chin and turn his face to the light I will finish," murmured the native barber as he busily plied his razor, the keen steel glinting in the morning rays. "So; I thank you, sahib. A little moment and I shall have ended."

"And then there is another to tackle, Ikand," a second voice chimed in; "and I'll warrant the growth here will scarcely take you so long to cut down. Well, it's a blessing to have so little beard in this hot climate."

The youth who had spoken last, and who sat stretched at his ease in a long cane chair, glanced languidly at his companion, a lad a year senior to himself. He, too, occupied a basket lounge, reclining in which, with head propped in a suitable position, and eyes half closed, he was submitting to the attentions of a lanky native barber, whose fingers, despite the intense heat, were clammy and uncomfortably cold. Scrape, scrape! To tell the truth, though the man did his utmost, the sound of the razor was not striking crisply into the air, as it usually does from the chin of an adult, but was dull and devoid of ring, seeming to indicate that the instrument travelled across features as yet innocent of beard.

"Yes, it is a comfort," replied the first speaker. "It means that, while others are detained ten minutes and more every

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morning, you and I are made respectable within half the time. Heigh-ho! I'm sleepy. This hot weather tells upon one, and when one has remained awake most of the night, tossing uneasily from side to side, and listening to the dreary swish of the punkah, why then, it's not wonderful that one's eyelids get heavy when the cool morning hours arrive. But we must hurry up, for the parade is in less than half an hour, and to be late for that would be dreadful. Done, Ikand? Then out of the way while I hop to the bath."

He threw the towel from his chin, and, springing to the floor of the veranda, gathered the folds of his dressing-gown about him and disappeared.

"Bet you I'm ready first," cried his companion after him. "Here, on with the lather, Ikand, and look slippy."

A minute later the splash of water was heard, while from beneath the bamboo door which had shut out the figure of the barber's first client a deluge swirled, and went dripping from the edge of the veranda. Soon both young fellows were fully dressed, and strolled on to the veranda, buckling swords on as they went. They sat down at a table upon which stood two cups of steaming tea, toast, and bananas, and proceeded to partake of "chota hazaree" (small breakfast), the light meal with which all Anglo-Indians commence the day.

And now, whilst they satisfy their hunger, let us turn and glance at the surroundings. The scene is in India, in the hot, arid plains, and in a part of the country adjacent to the North-west Provinces. It is situated in the Terai, that part of the plain which, extending from the mountains downwards, is known by this name for the distance of some hundred miles.

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In the centre of a wide, flat stretch of ground, which is cut up in all directions by nullahs, and covered with parched, brown grass, stands a long bungalow, surrounded by trees and a compound, and clad with many a creeper and flowering rose. As houses in India go it is large and commodious, and evidently belongs to some important individual. Indeed, the long, red burgee which flies from a flag-post erected in the centre of the lawn, and the number of servants hovering about, proclaim that the owner is a man of position and means. A glance at a board which is nailed to the gates of the drive discovers his identity, for there, neatly painted in white upon a black ground, and repeated below in Hindu letters, are the words, "Major Watson".

Who is Major Watson? What troops does he command?

Away through the supporting posts of the veranda may be seen a mass of buildings cropping up from the plain. They enclose a large square space, and are themselves surrounded by walls of granite that tower high into the air and show embrasures and battlements above. The muzzles of cannon project, while a host of turbaned and helmeted heads stand out above the edge, silhouetted sharply against the background of the Himalayas, from the snow slopes of which the rays of the rising sun are flashed back with dazzling brilliancy. Those are the soldiers over whom Major Watson holds sway, and yonder town is Rowpoor, the capital of the presidency of the same name, the Rajah of which is as yet only a boy, subject to English rule and education.

Major Watson had been sent to the presidency a few years before, to act as "dewan" or political officer—in fact to

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keep a watchful eye upon the country and its people, and to see that the loyalty of its soldiery was ensured. Claude and Reginald, the two lads who have been introduced while completing their toilet, were the major's nephews, and had joined him a short year before.

"It's just like a little kingdom," remarked Claude, striding to the edge of the veranda and pointing to the town below. "Look at the palace in the centre of the square. Even from here one can realize that it is a magnificent building, fit for the home of a prince. But think of the gardens which surround it, of the fountains which play there, and of the pleasant summer-houses which a former Rajah built for the comfort of his wives. It is indeed the capital of this kingdom. Then look at all those men. What are their numbers, Reg?"

"Twenty-three thousand foot, horse, and gunners, ten guns, and three hundred elephants," was the answer. "Yes, Claude, the little Rajah is a regular king, and has cause to feel proud, for it is said that the soldiers of this presidency are excellently drilled, and are as fine a body of men as one could come across in any day's march."

"All of which is due to Uncle Harry," added Claude. "You see he has been here some years. He was made 'dewan' when the East India Company conquered this state, and after the old Rajah died it was the 'Major Sahib', as they call him here, who took the youngster in hand. Yes, it is said that Rowpoor is, for its size, a most prosperous state. But still all does not go as smoothly as it should, for Uncle says that a firm hand is needed, and that were he absent there would be trouble, and Icktabo Sing, the little Rajah, would be deposed by those who now cringe before him. But—hurry up! I

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can see the troops filing out of the gates, and there go the bugles."

As he spoke, the crisp, clear notes of a distant bugle could be heard, sounding the "Fall in", and at once, running from all quarters, some with matchlocks over their shoulders, and others with long, curved tulwars in their hands, the soldiers of the Rajah of Rowpoor came hastening to their parade-ground, just without the gates of the town, and formed up there in orderly lines. Claude and Reg Watson hastily gulped down the remainder of their chota hazaree, and shouted to their grooms. A minute later they were in the saddle, and, leaving the "compound", as gardens are known in India, they cantered towards the assembled troops.

Let us take stock of them as they ride. Walking or seated in the saddle it is easy to distinguish between the two, even at a distance. Claude is a tall, long-limbed fellow, with fresh, open face and steady eyes. The dress of a staff-officer suits him admirably, and he is particularly spruce and neat. Still, for all that there is nothing of the dandy about him. He wears a business-like, soldierly air, and rides in a manner that shows he is a practised horseman. Indeed he is more, for during his year of residence in the country he has devoted himself to military training, and has shown that, given a good mount and a sabre, he has the makings of a smart cavalry officer about him.

Reginald Watson is the opposite of his brother. Short, broad-shouldered, and sturdy, he lacks the life, the wit, and ready resource of Claude. His is the nature that is made to be led, to follow blindly and faithfully. Ever since he and his brother went to school Claude has been leader in every-

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thing, whether in book-work or in the play-ground. He captained the cricket team, and outran his fellows in every race. But Reg was by no means eclipsed. His solid, sterling nature brought him to the fore, less prominently perhaps, but still to such an extent that his comrades knew his worth, knew that the careless, easy-going Reg was a friend to rely upon, a terror to the bully and upstart, and a remarkably good fellow.

When they reached the parade-ground they pulled in their horses, and, riding slowly to a group of horsemen who faced the native regiments, saluted a tall Englishman smartly. The salute was returned, and Major Watson, for it was their uncle who sat his horse in the centre of the group, beckoned them towards him.

"A minute more and you would have been late," he remarked with a smile. "Young rascals!—when you know how I wish you to set an example. But come, to business. This is to be the biggest review of the year, and I want you two to show how troops should be led. Claude, you have had a good training with all arms, and with the Rajah's permission I will place you in charge of half of the soldiers. Reg shall act as your lieutenant. You will be given blank ammunition, and you will be set the task of capturing Rowpoor. See whether you can do it, my lad. Do your utmost to prove a match for Indoo Khan, who will command the other half. I am sure that if your side proves the more successful he will forgive you."

He turned with a smile and a bow to a man who rode beside him. He was a dark, hard-featured Hindu, with bristling beard and moustache, and a pair of slit-like, twink-

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ling eyes. He was dressed in a uniform which surpassed all others in richness, and bore a dazzling aigrette in his turban. At the words he saluted gravely and smiled. But the sharp, ferrety eyes twinkled cruelly, and the brows contracted till he scowled.

"Let the young sahib win," he said sourly, "and I shall be rejoiced. But let him beware. Indoo Khan is an old hand at warfare. He has commanded men where cannon fired in earnest and bullets swept the plain."

"Then all the better for my nephew," answered the major. "If he is beaten it will be only as it should be, while if he takes the town it will be a feather in his cap, for he will have worsted the Rajah's general, and one who is reputed to be a clever soldier."

The compliment seemed to soothe the fierce-looking Hindu, for he smiled and showed his teeth. But a moment later, when the attention of Major Watson and his two nephews was attracted elsewhere, the scowl returned, and he looked at all three as though he would kill them.

"What if the young man does succeed?" he thought. "Perhaps he will, but it will be different when Indoo Khan leads the troops in real war. Wait, my English masters! But yesterday a tale was told me by one who had travelled many miles, and who had broken his journey at many towns. 'The time is come to overthrow our English masters,' he said. 'The British Raj is failing in strength and purpose, and in a year, in a month, in a week perhaps, it will be deposed. Prepare! Make ready your troops, and stir their anger as I shall tell you. Then, when the time arrives, answer the signal that shall be passed to you by rising, by slaying

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your dewan, and by marching upon the nearest town!’ That is what the holy man said in my ear, and I have remembered. Ah, wait, Major sahib, and you too, his nephews. Indoo Khan is your friend and your servant till a certain day, then his arm shall strike the blow that will kill you.”

The prospect seemed to give the dusky warrior the greatest pleasure, for his features relaxed and he smiled. What man amongst the group of horsemen assembled there could have followed the train of thought flowing through the mind of Indoo Khan? To all appearance he was a harmless native officer, cheerfully serving the Rajah of Rowpoor and his English adviser. But he was more. In his heart the Hindu hated the British, and was jealous of his youthful master, who had succeeded to the post of chief of the state. His busy brain was gradually preparing a scheme by which he, Indoo Khan, would rise to the position of Rajah, and trample down the rightful heir and his English friends.

“It would be a fine position,” he thought as his eye passed down the lines of soldiery and then surveyed the guns and the magnificent elephants which drew them. “Perhaps it may come about that my countrymen will rise and expel the British. That will mean heavy fighting, in which I will take a share. Here are men sufficient to win me a name, and perhaps a presidency bigger even than Rowpoor. The Rajah will not hinder me. He is a boy, and can easily be put aside.”

A movement on the part of Major Watson interrupted Indoo Khan, and he at once rode up to the dewan.

“We will form them up in review order now,” said the major. “Then, when his highness has inspected them, they

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can march past and go straight to their posts. General, gallop forward and see that all is in order. Claude, you and Reg may proceed to the palace and report to the Rajah that all is ready for his reception. Be careful to salute him, and lead his procession back to the parade-ground."

Saluting, the two trotted away, passing down the whole front of the native army on their way to the entrance gate of Rowpoor. To the right of the line, and standing a little back, were the Rajah's ten guns, with their draught elephants halted submissively before them. For trappings the animals bore a few gilded tassels only, and differed greatly from those employed to convey the chief himself. Next to the guns stood the infantry, in serried lines, smart and extremely soldierlike. On the left the cavalry had taken post, and as the two lads passed they had ample opportunity of admiring them, and the quaint and picturesque old armour in which they were clad. Indeed the chain-mail, the curved tulwars, and enormously long spurs made them appear like a Saracen host of old.

"Splendid fellows!" remarked Claude warmly. "If well led, and given little time to count the odds, they could do enormous damage to an enemy. It is wonderful to think how our English forefathers mastered this huge country when such men fought against them."

"Yes, it was a fine thing," answered Reg slowly. "But then you have to recollect that an Englishman coming from oversea brings his go and his daring into a land where slackness has been the order of the day. The men of the West are worth a dozen and more of those of the East. In brains, courage, and activity we are more than a match for the natives,

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and to those qualities we owe this huge possession. But I tremble to think how matters would go if the natives were to rise."

"It would be a bad job, Reg. A precious nasty affair for us English. We should be outnumbered a thousand to one, and we should have to meet highly-trained soldiers. That's where the danger lies. There are many thousands of men of all branches of the service who draw pay from the Company, and are depended upon to fight for us. But supposing they rebelled, broke into mutiny, as you suggest, well, we should be in a tight corner. In fact, it would be nearly a case of all up with the British."

"We'd pull through, depend upon it," cried Reg. "But, seriously, Claude, things are not going as smoothly as they might. At least that is what I gather from Uncle. He is anxious and worried, and always on the look-out for some dreadful calamity, the exact nature of which he keeps to himself."

"I know," rejoined Claude. "And the extraordinary part of the mystery is, that while we know that Uncle is worried, and fears some rising, others pooh-pooh the idea. In fact, officers of native regiments declare that discipline was never better than it is now. But we shall see. At the present moment we have something else to think about. I tell you, Reg, I'd give a lot to beat that fellow Indoo this afternoon. He doesn't like me much, I know, and somehow I feel that he thinks of us as mere boys. I'd like to show him that, whatever our age, we have something in us."

"Then, now is your opportunity, Claude. I'm no strategist, and, in fact, whenever I attempt to handle troops I invariably

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get the regiments into hopeless confusion. But as your aide-de-camp I can be of some use, and you can trust me to carry out an order to the letter."

"Right, old boy!" his brother answered. "We'll put our heads together and see what we can do. Now for the Rajah."

They had arrived at a wide gate, which led through an archway beneath the wall of the town. A sentry stood without, and as they passed held his tulwar at the salute; for though young, Claude and Reg were of some consequence in the presidency of Rowpoor. Within there was a guard-house, and at a shout from Claude a man ran out to hold the horses. Then the two young officers, looking particularly smart in a uniform resembling that worn by Bengal gunners, leapt from their saddles and strode towards the palace, which was situated in the centre of the square.

It was evident that the Rajah was expected to make an appearance, for as they left the gateway the guard filed out into the open, and began to take up a position so as to salute their chief as he passed; then the civil population was drawn up on either side in a huge swaying mass, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow. Beyond them a double line was formed by magnificent elephants, whose trunks, when stretched out, almost completed an arch of flesh over the road the Rajah would use. Decked with gorgeous howdahs, and trapped with rich cloths, these immense animals were a sight worth seeing. Some were painted scarlet from head to foot, while gold rings encircled their trunks and their feet. Others were clad in a variety of colours, and bore silver ornaments, while at the palace steps, swaying softly from side to side as an elephant loves to do, was one that overtopped every other. From fore-

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head to the tip of his trunk he was covered with fine gold paint, which flashed in the sun. The mahout who bestrode his neck was almost as gaudily dressed as Indoo Khan himself, while behind him, as if to add a fitting cover to it all, was a howdah of silver gilt, the value of which must have surpassed a prince's ransom.

"A fine show," remarked Claude as he and Reg strode along. "Our little friend the Rajah is a lucky fellow, and must count his rupees by the thousand. But I would not change places with him for all his wealth."

"Nor I, Claude. I believe he has the makings of a downright good fellow, but he is hemmed in by etiquette. It is true he can ride a horse, and occasionally hunts, but the greater part of his time seems to be spent in the palace, looking after the affairs of the state."

"Just like his father before him," said Claude. "Still, little Icktabo Sing would love to join in all our games, I'm sure, and only his position keeps him from doing so. But here we are at the palace steps. Come along, Reg, and don't forget the salute."

They ascended a flight of marble stairs, and entered a large and handsome building. Keeping straight on, and acknowledging the salutes of the occasional guards whom they passed, they soon reached a heavy curtain which gave admission to the Rajah's sanctum. A minute later and they were drawn up before a divan, upon which was seated a Hindu lad of some fifteen years. He was short, slim, and delicate-looking, but held himself proudly. He was richly dressed, and jewels blazed from his turban, and from every part of his body.

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Acknowledging the salute of the young officers, he sprang from his seat with a cry of joy, and, coming forward, warmly shook both by the hand.

"Ah, this is what I have waited for!" he cried eagerly. "Last time we met, you may remember, you asked if I ever hunted, and how I employed my time. Unfortunately for me I have many things to do that tie me to the palace, but I long for the life you lead. I would give much to join you in your morning rides, or to take my gun and gallop towards the jungle, at the outskirts of which small game is to be found. But I have news for you. At last I have been able to arrange for a shooting expedition. This is the season when tigers abound, and we will go out against them. Will you both come? The major sahib has consented, and Indoo Khan seems to think well of the plan."

Both lads eagerly acquiesced, for they had never been on such an expedition.

"That is good," said the youthful Rajah, his eyes twinkling with pleasure and excitement. "We will go together. You two and myself will find room in my howdah, and we will see who kills the first tiger. Tell me, Claude sahib, does the prospect give you pleasure, and will you care to take the risk that always is present when hunting the tiger?"

"Your highness has given me an opportunity which may never come again," Claude answered, "and whatever the risk I will gladly go. Of course I cannot say how I shall feel when we get into the jungle and the tiger begins to rush for the elephant. Still, I'll do my best to keep my nerve and shoot straight."

"I'm sure you will," the Rajah said heartily. "One who

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rides as you do will not fail to show a cool front when the moment of danger arrives. Now, tell me. Are not the troops ready to be reviewed?"

"They are, your highness," answered Claude. "The plan is that you should pass down the ranks, and then that all should march before you. After that I am to take command of half, and, retiring from the plain, attack the town of Row-poor, the general, Indoo Khan, defending the approaches with the remaining half."

"Then you will entertain us greatly, Claude sahib. I have watched you, and indeed have often longed to fill your place, and to have the freedom you enjoy. I wish you success. But beware, sahib. The general of my humble forces is an ambitious man. He likes not to be worsted, and indeed loves to take the leading part; so much so that I, who am head of this state, am so only in name. But for the major sahib, Indoo Khan would be all-powerful. Beware, I say, for an ambitious man, when openly defeated, becomes an enemy who will not forgive or forget, and who will strive for vengeance till the last. Now, if you are ready, sahibs, we will pass out of the palace."

He led the way into the corridor, and shortly afterwards climbed the silver ladder which led to his howdah. Then the massive brute, which had been kneeling, rose to its feet, and to the accompaniment of much braying of trumpets passed down the line, each elephant, as the Rajah swept by, lowering his trunk and kneeling at the bidding of his mahout. On every side men were salaaming, while the women waved their hands. At length, led by Claude and Reg, the procession reached the parade-ground and halted before the assembled troops.

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"Have I your permission to proceed with the review?" asked Major Watson, riding forward and saluting the little Prince of Rowpoor.

"Certainly. I will inspect the troops now," was the answer.

Accordingly, led by the major, and followed by a brilliant staff of officers, amongst whom rode Claude and Reg, the youthful chief passed down the line.

"They are a fine lot," he exclaimed with pride when the inspection was over. "I desire, Major sahib, that when next you forward your despatches to Lord Canning, the Governor of India, you will represent to him the condition of this state. Tell him that its Rajah and his troops are loyal to the English Raj."

Young though the chief of Rowpoor was, the words to which he gave utterance were what might well have been expected, for he had been most carefully trained by the major for many years, and being a shrewd and tractable boy, was far in advance of his age. Indeed, though not yet sixteen, he had long since grasped the importance of his position, and the influence it was in his power to exercise for the good of his state. An English tutor had imbued in him something of Western ways, had encouraged him to act for himself, and had implanted in him some amount of that characteristic pluck and go for which men of Britain are famous.

"Now," cried the Rajah, turning to the major and Indoo Khan, "let us see this great battle. General, I place the safety of myself and the capital in your hands. Let us see how you will deal with your charge. To the one who is successful I will give a jewelled sword in memory of the event."

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He nodded to Indoo Khan, and went on his way to the town, intending to take post on the battlements, and from there watch the progress of events.

"Sahib, which of the troops will you take?" said the general, turning to Claude. "See them—horse, foot, and guns. Choose well, for the task you have been set is no easy one. The major sahib bids you command one-half. Let Indoo Khan give his advice. He who would attack and win must hold the odds. Take, then, two-thirds of the soldiers, and leave me the remainder."

"Thank you, General," Claude answered promptly; "I will do as the major sahib ordered. We will see how Rowpoor is defended; but I warn you that I want to win that sword."

He smiled in a friendly manner at the Hindu general, for it was as well to be on the best of terms. Then, beckoning Reg to his side, and smartly saluting his uncle, he rode towards the troops, and very soon was leading his men away across the plain.

As for Indoo Khan, with a scarcely-cloaked sneer and a disdainful toss of his plumed turban, he rode closer to the ten thousand odd assigned to him, and inspected them critically. Then his eye wandered to the walls of Rowpoor, and afterwards across the plain. Calling a native aide-de-camp to his side, he set spurs to his horse and galloped well into the open, where, drawing rein, he discussed a plan for the defence of Rowpoor.

CHAPTER II

A Clever Ruse

WE'LL call a halt half a mile farther on, and then hold a council of war," said Claude gaily, as he and Reg rode together over a narrow bridge which spanned a deep river, and pulled in their animals while they watched the troops cross.

The cavalry leading, and infantry following, with the five guns in between, they made a brave show.

"With such fellows we ought to be able to take Rowpoor," went on Claude, "but we shall have to draw up our plans very carefully, for Indoo Khan will prove a wily antagonist. Tell me, Reg, have you come across any happy idea? If the attack were in your hands, how would you direct the troops? Remember that this river is the midway line. Until the signal-gun is fired it remains neutral ground—neither side may hold the bridge."

"And it is practically the only way to Rowpoor," his brother rejoined. "It seems to me that, that being the case, the only thing to do will be to go hammer-and-tongs for it. Indoo will bring up his whole force, and so will you. You'll have to fight it out; only, as blank ammunition is to be used, I cannot see how the umpires can give victory to either side."

"That's just it, Reg. This is not real warfare, and therefore there is all the more reason to use strategy. The one

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who prepares and carries out the most skilful and successful ruse will win the day. Now, what will the native general do? He'll concentrate all his men at the bridge, or I'll be much surprised. My object will be to engage him there, and turn his flank. Tell me, is there no other way across the river?"

Reg shook his head vigorously.

"There's not a single practicable ford," he answered promptly. "Since the snow commenced to melt on the Himalayas the river has deepened by two feet, so that the ford three miles below the bridge is no longer safe. The stream runs five feet there at least."

"Then that will suit," answered Claude with decision. "I remember now that it is situated at a bend where the water is sluggish. That being the case, I have a plan by which we can cross it dry-shod. Now, let us ride on till we reach the edge of the jungle. I mean to make full use of the cover the trees will give."

They turned their horses, and rode on in the wake of the troop. Half an hour later Claude and his following, numbering in all some ten thousand men, were hidden behind a straggling belt of brushwood which cropped up on the plain, and which, though sufficient to hide the movements of an army, was yet too sparse to hamper its movements greatly. It was, in fact, the outer margin of that portion of the country to which the name Terai is given, for from here trees increased in number till at length they formed an impenetrable jungle that stretched, practically unbroken, to the base of the Himalayas. The forest offered most inviting shade from the heat of the sun, but they had other things to think about, and besides, unless bent upon a shooting expedition, would not

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have dreamed of entering the jungle, for in the hot weather it is the home of fever, and moreover it is infested by numerous tigers.

Between Rowpoor and the outskirts of the forest ran a narrow but deep stream, and it was this that formed the barrier between the attacking and the defending forces.

"It's going to be a very difficult undertaking," said Claude, turning and looking at the distant town. "I'll call the native officers up."

The troops were now halted, and at a word from Claude the officers came forward and stood about him. All were men of middle age or more, and at first it seemed ridiculous to see Claude and his brother confronting them as leaders. But then, in India, and particularly in those days, an Englishman, however young, at once took a prominent place. Indeed, while in an English regiment Claude might have waited years without getting command of more than a thousand men, here he was, a mere boy, leading an army. Truly a great responsibility for such young shoulders, even though in peace times!

"Now, gentlemen," said Claude, using the native language, "when the signal-gun sounds, and we form for the attack, which road shall we take? Sabar Hin, I turn to you as senior officer."

"Sahib, it is an easy question that you ask," replied a lanky man with bushy black beard. "Surely there is but one road to Rowpoor in these days when the river floods run high. See, there it is."

He stood in his stirrups and pointed to the winding track that skirted the jungle and then wended its flat, dusty way to the bridge.

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"And what if the general opposes us there?" asked Claude.

"Then you must sweep him away, sahib," came the answer. "Send your guns down the moment the report reaches our ears."

"And what say you?" asked Claude, turning to the others.

For a minute and more there was no answer. Then a second officer stepped forward and upheld his senior's decision.

"Lead us to the bridge, sahib," he said. "This battle will be one for the guns only. The cavalry are useless."

"Very well, gentlemen, I will consider the matter," said Claude. "Now, Reg, come along with me," he continued. "We'll get out of ear-shot, and then I'll tell you how I mean to outwit Indoo and take Rowpoor."

"You'll be precious cute if you do, old boy," his brother answered with a smile. "Now, what is the plan?"

"This, Reg. We'll make a strong feint on the bridge, and while the general and the opposing troops are holding it in full force, we'll detach the greater part of our men to that ford down the river. I know the river's deep, but a horseman could swim it at a pinch. However, that is not my intention. Look at those carts that accompany the guns."

He pointed to five native vehicles of curious construction. They were heavily built, and supported on two wheels only. They were the transport for the guns, and in war-time would be laden with shell and ammunition. Now, the long space between the wheels, which was boxed in on either side and at each end, and covered by a strong wooden lid, was empty, save for a few blank charges which could easily be dispensed with.

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"Ammunition-carts!" exclaimed Reg, at a loss to understand the drift of his brother's thoughts. "How can they help you?"

"Like this, old boy. We'll send them to the ford, and back one into the water as far as possible. Then, when the horses are taken out, a few lusty fellows at the shafts will soon send the cart well into the centre. The men must then wade in and push it right across. If it shows any inclination to float we must load it with stones. Once in position, another will follow, and then a third. Four, or at the most five, should be sufficient, and when securely fastened together will bridge the place. The spaces between must be filled in with planking, about which there should be no difficulty, for there is a native saw-mill above the ford, and the necessary planks can be borrowed."

"It sounds very well, Claude," Reg exclaimed eagerly; "but what about the cavalry? The bridge you intend to make may do for infantry well enough; but for horses—I doubt it."

"If it is good enough and safe for the foot regiments, it will suit the cavalry," his brother answered with emphasis. "The horses are as clever as cats, and can be relied upon to go wherever the infantry go."

"Then we'll take Rowpoor, that's all I can say," cried Reg, catching his brother's enthusiasm, now that the difficulty had been explained. "Here, tell me what I can do. You'll want someone to help you."

"You've heard my description of the bridge, and you've tumbled to the dodge. See whether you can build it satisfactorily. There; we've no time to chat. Follow me to the guns, and when the signal is fired, set off through the bush as

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hard as you can with the cavalry and the ammunition-wagons. Make a wide detour, and whatever you do, contrive to keep your men and your movements hidden by the forest. When you have completed the work, send word to me."

Without further explanation Claude rode quietly along the line and pulled up at the guns, calling to the native officer in charge.

"Send a couple of men of each section to the carts immediately the signal is fired," said Claude, "and let them lift out the blank ammunition. When that is done, move the guns to the edge of the cover and wait for my word to fire. You will be supported by infantry."

Having seen to this matter, Claude called the various commanders of horse and foot, and gave them precise instructions. Then, dismounting so as to rest their horses, they selected a tope of green trees, and, pausing only to assure themselves that no reptile lay hidden there, sat down until the signal should sound. A few minutes later the boom of one of the fortress guns reverberated through the air, and both at once dashed to their horses.

"Steady!" said Claude. "Remember that we have to set the example, Reg, old boy. I confess it is hard to appear cool and used to this sort of thing, for even peaceful manœuvres are exciting. However, we must do it. Now, off you go, and remember, keep well out of sight."

Reg nodded, and, turning his horse, jogged across to the guns. A few minutes later he was riding away at a smart pace into the bush, the ammunition-carts thundering after him, and the whole force of cavalry at Claude's disposal bringing up the rear.

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"Ha! There goes one of our leaders on some mad expedition!" muttered the senior native officer into his beard. "Fools! They will not succeed in defeating our general."

He sniffed contemptuously, and turned to his subordinate with a disdainful shrug, for he was no lover of the English, and, to tell the truth, was already hand in glove with Indoo Khan, conspiring to oust the British from India.

"Fools or not, they are brave and show us the way," was the sharp retort. "The sahibs have some great plot afoot, and they will triumph."

But now a cloud of dust rose in the direction of Rowpoor. Soon dark forms appeared, and, almost before they were expected, Indoo Khan and his men were in position, while a line of cavalry scouts rode forward to the very bank of the river.

Meanwhile Claude had not been idle. A regiment of foot had been sent forward at a run, with instructions to take post in the bush which fringed the river, and to keep up a hot fire therefrom. Other regiments showed in the open for a few minutes, as if marching on the bridge, but retired into the jungle when the enemy's guns opened.

"That will show Indoo that we are posted opposite the bridge," thought Claude. "He will have seen the infantry, and will think that I have sent them back to shelter, as any careful leader would do. I'll set the guns to work, and later will send them forward so as to occupy attention fully."

By now it was apparent that the whole of the opposing force was collected on the farther side of the bridge, and it was equally certain that, had the battle been in earnest, a crossing could only have been made after heavy loss.

For half an hour the duel went on, Claude and his men

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being for the most part hidden, while Indoo Khan and his troops were clearly discernible. Indeed, the general had evidently little faith in the powers of his youthful opponent, for he stood beneath the shade afforded by a tope of leafy trees, and openly scoffed.

"It is as I thought," he remarked to a brother native. "The Englishman will post his soldiers at the bridge, and when he has had sufficient time to come to a decision, he will launch his whole force at it. Then my guns shall gallop up, and you will see; I will blow them into the air. Or rather, I would if it were real war."

When an hour had passed, a sudden movement on the part of the attacking force seemed to justify the general's surmise. Regiments which had been hidden in the jungle now came into view, marching determinedly for the bridge. But it was only a clever ruse, for no sooner did the opposing guns gallop closer, and open on them, than they retired, and once out of sight even took to their heels. With matchlocks at the trail they ran through the scrub at a steady pace, and before long arrived at the ford, which Reg had succeeded in bridging. The cavalry were already across, and waiting in the friendly shelter of a belt of trees. A quarter of an hour later all were marching towards Rowpoo.

"We'll keep along in this hollow," cried Reg, who was leading them. "It should take us almost to the gates, but we'll turn off half a mile farther on, and march on Indoo's flank and rear. Those are the instructions which Claude sahib gave me."

Indeed, his brother had formed his plans in the most clear-headed manner. Knowing that to force the bridge would be

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impossible, he had determined to turn the enemy's flank, sending a small force to capture the city gate. As Reg was leading the flanking-party, Claude was fidgeting in his saddle, constantly turning his eyes to the right. Suddenly he caught sight of some horsemen, and at once rode towards the bridge.

"All the men will advance!" he shouted, waving his sword to the two regiments that now remained. "For the bridge! Charge!"

Now was Indoo's time. Moving his guns to the flank, he called up the whole of the force at his command, and was about to launch them at the bridge, when there was the thunder of cavalry behind him.

"The enemy is upon us!" cried one of his officers. "They have crossed the river and are attacking us in flank and rear!"

It was but too true. Ere Indoo Khan could prevent it, he and his men were surrounded on all sides. His guns were captured by a squadron of horse, and now utter destruction awaited them. Well for him was it that it was mimic warfare, for already Claude's five guns were crossing the bridge to come into close action, while that young leader himself was pressing forward, waving his helmet, and urging the troops to advance.

"At them!" he shouted in the native language. "Do not give them time to rally!"

Elated at the success of the movement which their young leader had planned, the men eagerly obeyed, and advanced at a run towards their opponents, fixing bayonets as they went. In the excitement of the moment some might even have used them with effect as soon as they got to close quarters, but,

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happily, Major Watson and a group of officers galloped up at that moment.

"Stop!" said the former, lifting his hand. "As umpire I give the victory to Claude sahib. The ruse was a clever one. The general's troops are surrounded and at the mercy of the others. In real warfare they would have had to surrender, or more than half would have been killed. The remainder could only have been taken, for Rowpoor is in the hands of Claude sahib's troopers.

"What! The fortress captured?" exclaimed Indoo Khan, advancing at this moment. "Impossible, Major sahib."

"Look there, then," was the calm reply. "See, the flag is dipping, so that you may plainly perceive that you have lost."

"Beaten by an English boy!" cried the general angrily, at last realizing the turn affairs had taken.

"Yes, General, by an Englishman. You have been fairly defeated."

For a minute or more Indoo Khan glared angrily at the major, and at Claude and his brother. Then, swallowing his displeasure as well as he could, and with as good a grace as he was able to command, he saluted and turned away.

"Beaten! Outmanœuvred by a cub!" he muttered angrily. "Wait, Claude sahib, and you, the major sahib. These are peace times, and defeat can do no harm to Indoo Khan save wounding his pride; but the day of rebellion draws nigh. Even now the thousands of sepoy in Bengal and Oudh are murmuring. They hate their English masters, their tyrants, and they will rise. Then the land will be covered with dead, and the rivers run red to the sea. It shall be a bitter and thorough revenge, and the thought of it must console me!"

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"Hum, took it badly, as I feared he would," remarked the major as he and his two nephews rode slowly home, leaving the native general to lead the troops back to their quarters. "That man has a nasty face. He is treacherous, I fancy, and I do not trust him. Yes, we shall have to be on our guard, for trouble is brewing."

He said the words as if unconsciously repeating his thoughts aloud.

"Trouble? What sort of trouble do you fear, Uncle?" asked Claude.

"I scarcely know," was the answer. "It is hard to say definitely what one fears. This I know, however, that though all is outwardly peaceful, though on every hand loyalty is boasted by the people, there is an undercurrent of discontent. Some grievance, some imaginary hardship, is simmering in the brains of the sepoys. Whether it will subside, or whether it will boil so fiercely as to cause fighting, I cannot say. But my opinion is that trouble is at hand. Indeed, at the risk of being thought an old croaker, I say that we are on the eve of some terrible catastrophe. As to Indoo Khan, I am sorry he cannot take his defeat more pleasantly. But you could see how angry he was. He is a dangerous man, boys, and I warn you now to watch him carefully. If there were a rebellion now he would be one of the leaders."

"Yes; and his first action would be to imprison us," burst in Reg.

"Quite so. He might even descend to violence," Major Watson quietly replied. "Now, lads, just keep your eyes open, and do not fail to bring me news if you see anything that excites your suspicion."

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"We will, Uncle. You may be sure that after your warning we shall be alert."

"That is good, Claude. And now let us get to the palace. You have to be presented with your prize."

Accordingly the trio put their horses into a trot, which soon brought them to the gates of Rowpoor. Ten minutes later they were in the presence of the youthful Rajah.

"Welcome and congratulations to you, Claude sahib!" he cried. "From my look-out upon one of the towers I watched the whole movement, and when I saw you throw your whole force toward the bridge I thought your case hopeless. Then you retired into the forest, and only your guns and sharpshooters were in action. 'Surely,' I said to myself, 'he will dash blindly forward, and the day must then go against him, for Indoo is posted to advantage.' Then, of a sudden, your horsemen appeared on the left, and ere I could think they were at our gates, while others were hemming in my general. Truly, Claude sahib, you have shown yourself a leader to-day, and have well earned this sword which I present to you."

He went to a carved table, and took from it a long curved tulwar or native sword, the hilt of which was inlaid with costly gems. Claude accepted it with thanks, and he and his uncle had turned to depart when the Rajah called after them.

"Prepare for to-morrow," he said. "There is news that a man-eating tiger is abroad in the jungle. Indeed, no fewer than four villages on the outskirts of the forest have been visited by it, and men killed. At dawn to-morrow we will go out to kill the monster, so be ready, sahibs."

Expressing pleasure at the news, the three left the palace and returned to the bungalow, where they rested till the

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evening. That night, after dinner, Claude and his brother Reg sauntered down to the town once more, and made for the guard-house which gave admission to the battlements above.

"It's cooler to-night," the former had said, as they were lolling in their chairs beneath the punkah while they sipped their after-dinner coffee, "and as we have so often heard how beautiful the view of the Himalayas is when seen from the battlements, with the moon shining upon the snow-clad peaks, I vote we fill in the hours between this and bed-time by going there."

"Right!" answered Reg. "There is nothing I should like better."

Accordingly, dressed in their white mess kit, they strolled across the plain until they reached the gate, when a hoarse challenge brought them to a stand-still.

"Halt!" cried the sentry. "Who is it who walks about at night?"

"Claude sahib," answered our hero. "Open, for we wish to enter."

A light footfall was heard upon the steps which descended from the battlement upon which the sentry was posted, and then a tiny wicket was opened, admitting them beneath the archway.

"We wish to pass upon the walls," said Claude, who, thanks to seven or eight years of residence in India when a child, spoke the language fluently. "Tell me, what is the counter-sign?"

"Delhi, sahib. The word will pass you even into the palace."

The man shouldered his musket, and, responding to the

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salute, the two lads passed up the narrow and steep flight of stairs which led to the battlements. They emerged upon a broad terrace, along the inner edge of which ran a light bamboo rail, while the outer was protected by masonry, intersected by numerous embrasures in which cannon stood. They made for a large watch-tower situated upon that side of Rowpoor which faced the Himalayas, and, pushing the heavy door open, entered.

"Mind your shins," said Claude in tones of warning. "The place is as dark as a pit, and I've no idea where the stairs are. Here, wait a minute while I light a match."

He fumbled for one in his pocket, and struck it against the wall.

"There we are!" cried Reg, starting forward as the flash illuminated the room. "Up we go, old chap."

Looking about them the lads saw that they were in a large, square chamber, from one corner of which a flight of wooden stairs ascended somewhat steeply and was lost in the darkness of the roof above. A second match, however, showed that it led to a doorway which gave admission to the roof. The door was standing ajar.

"And now for this wonderful sight," said Claude, producing a cigarette. "Light up, Reg, and let us enjoy the scene."

Crossing to the edge of the battlements the two leant on the parapet, and stood there gazing at the distant landscape with rapt interest, for nowhere could it have been surpassed. As they reached the tower the edge of the moon was just appearing, and now she stood well above the distant range, steeping the snow-clad slopes in her gentle light, and dimly showing the vast expanse of jungle below. Sharp pinnacles and rugged

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craggs stood out prominently, while here and there a smooth glistening space proclaimed a glacier.

Suddenly a beam of light spurted out into the darkness directly beneath the summit of the tower and attracted the lads' attention.

"Hillo! what's that?" asked Claude, leaning over the wall. "The light is coming from a window which must open into the room below."

"What of that?" replied Reg languidly. "I suppose some sentry has come to look round, or perhaps we have been heard and have been taken for robbers."

"Perhaps," murmured Claude, and then a sudden thought aroused his suspicion.

"A sentry!" he said. "No, old chap, it cannot be. They must be aware that we are up here, for in times of peace there is only one stairway open to the battlements. I don't like that light, Reg. It is directly against the rules of the garrison, and it looks fishy. This is just the sort of place for a secret meeting."

"By Jove, you are a fellow!" Reg answered with a smile. "You'll be telling me next that Indoo Khan has followed on our tracks, and has come to revenge himself for his defeat to-day."

"Hush! keep quiet, Reg," whispered Claude, suddenly silencing his brother. "Listen; what do you make of that?"

As he spoke the clang of a door was heard, and a voice came rolling up the stairway.

"Close it and lock it firmly," was said in tones which both at once recognized as those of Indoo Khan, the little Rajah's

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general. "Ha! why have you left the window uncovered? Dolt! the light will cause us to be discovered unless you shut it in with your turban."

"Indoo Khan!" exclaimed Reg in astonishment.

"As you suggested," replied Claude in a whisper. "I don't like it, Reg. What is he doing here at this time of night? There is some secret meeting. Wait while I have a look."

He crept stealthily across the roof, and peered through the door at the top of the steps down into the room. A minute later he was back at his brother's side.

"They look for all the world like a lot of conspirators," he said. "Indoo is there, with four of the other officers, and a couple of villainous-looking fakirs are talking to them. Follow me. We can sit on the top step and listen, and yet be out of sight. Be awfully careful, old fellow, for if these fellows are plotting some wickedness, and learn that they are discovered, they will make very short work of us."

In another minute both were seated on the top step. About them all was pitch darkness, while below, the room was lighted by a couple of candles of native manufacture, which spluttered and smoked upon the stone-slabbed floor, filling the air with the pungent smell of burning fat. Seated about them were some huddled figures, one of whom was undoubtedly Indoo Khan.

"Disguised," whispered Claude in Reg's ear. "Lean over a little farther and you will see. Don't be afraid, we are well out of sight, and the top of these stairs is hidden in darkness."

"The general, dressed like a native servant, and his brother officers also," said Reg in tones of astonishment. "Why, these

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fakirs were travelling jugglers this morning! I saw them at the gate, and can distinctly recognize them. Hush! they are beginning to speak."

At that moment one of two wild and dishevelled-looking men rose to his feet, and addressed the conspirators assembled below.

"Are ye for us and the great and holy cause?" he asked solemnly. "Tell me, O Indoo Khan, our beloved brother, are the soldiers of Rowpoor ready to fight for their country, to bring about the downfall of the British Raj? Did you arouse their anger as I told you when last I came to this town?"

"I did even so," the disguised general replied. "The troops who feed at the hand of the Rajah had no quarrel with the English Raj till your story was spread about. Now, however, they gnash their teeth with rage, for they know that hundreds, indeed many, many thousands of our brothers are insulted by the orders of the British. Their religion is scandalized by a cunning device. Unable to tear us from the faith in which we and all good Hindus have been trained, our white-faced tyrants have issued cartridges to the soldiers, which have been greased with the fat of the sacred bull. Ignorant of their peril, our men have bitten the top from the cartridge, as is the habit in loading. Then, too late, alas! they have heard the tale. A deadly insult has been offered to them and to their religion by the slaughter of the sacred beast. Of a surety the soldiers of Rowpoor are angered. They will rise as one man when the signal comes."

"And then?"

"It shall be a day of rejoicing for us," said the general, his eyes glinting cruelly in the candle-light. "The sun shall not

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set ere thy servant sits as Rajah in the palace, with these, his friends, the favoured helpers about him."

"And the English? Have you none here?" asked the fakir.

"Ah! There are three; but Indoo Khan will know how to deal with them," replied the general.

"Then you are ready. Wait only for the signal, brother, and when the chupattee (little cake) passes your way, strike well for the downfall of the English Raj."

"George! A mutiny!" exclaimed Claude. "They are arranging a big rebellion, Reg. Did you hear them?"

His brother's answer did not reach his ears, for at that moment a gust of wind swept through the embrasures of the tower, and, catching the door at the top of the stair, swung it to with a bang.

CHAPTER III

Escape from Conspirators

ALREADY sufficient had reached the ears of the two young Englishmen to tell them that some dastardly plot was afoot. The downfall of the English was aimed at, and if all were true that the general, Indoo Khan, had said, the day was come for a rising. And the signal was to be the arrival of a chupattee, which was to go the round of the country. And then what would happen?

Both lads were asking themselves that question, and had fully realized that mutiny could only mean death for many English, when they were startled by the slamming of the door.

"Sit still for your life," Claude whispered, grasping his brother by the arm. "If we are discovered we shall be killed. Listen! What are they saying?"

For a minute or more the group had been silent, but now Indoo's voice was heard.

"What was that?" he asked in faltering tones, which showed that he, too, had been startled. "What caused the door to bang? Is there someone listening?"

"Nay, it is not treachery," one of the fakirs replied. "See, the candles still flicker from the draught which blew in from the roof above. It would be better to close and fasten the trap, my brother."

"Then do so," said the general, turning to one of his

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brother officers. "Climb to the roof, and look well about you ere you return. Go you with him also, Satrand. If there is anyone above it is well that there should be two to deal with the intruder."

At his words the officers rose to their feet and walked towards the ladder. Claude and Reg hastily retreated.

"Treachery! We have been overheard," shouted the general hoarsely. "There is someone above us, for I heard them spring upon the roof. What shall we do, my brothers?"

Meanwhile Claude and Reg had halted just outside the door, scarcely knowing how to act. In any case they were in an awkward and dangerous predicament, from which it would be well to escape as quickly as possible.

"The walls are out of the question," whispered Claude, looking round as though flight by means of a leap from the battlements had occurred to him. "The drop is too deep. We should be smashed to a jelly."

"That would be better than to be strangled by those villains," answered Reg. "If we are here more than a minute longer, we shall be killed. Ah! I have it; let's chance the drop from here to the battlements below! It cannot be more than thirty feet."

"Can't be done," his brother answered promptly. "Those beggars would be out through the door at once, and would fall upon us. Look here, Reg, just stand with me beside the entrance, and when anyone appears drive at him with your fist. We have little to fear, for even if they have revolvers they will not dare to use them lest the alarm should be given, while the stairway is too narrow for a tulwar to be used effectively. Now, look out! they are coming."

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Well was it for the two lads that fear of the uncertain kept Indoo's brother officers at the bottom of the stairway. At first, when it seemed that the noise of the banging door had been produced by the wind, they had stepped towards the ladder with alacrity; but at the sound of footsteps above, and the general's shout of "treachery", they had drawn back in doubt, and stood at the foot staring at the darkness above.

"What do you wait for?" cried Indoo Khan. "Up and seize them."

"But, General, suppose there are more than two," one of the men quavered; "they would have the advantage of us, and would cut us down."

"What! Are you a coward?" cried Indoo angrily. "Stand aside and I will lead you, for if we do not capture those above, we shall all be hanging by our necks by early dawn. Stand aside, I say, and follow me."

To do him justice, now that it was clear that there was some listener above, Indoo Khan was as brave as a lion. In a moment he realized that the safety of the whole party of conspirators depended upon the capture and instant death of whoever it was who had been so foolhardy as to pry upon them; otherwise the tale would at once be taken to the little Rajah and to the major sahib, and then Indoo and his accomplices would be rewarded with summary conviction and execution. Yes, there were still enough loyal men in the palace to carry out the order, for though with the soldiers all was ready for mutiny, a few officers and body servants still wavered. Elsewhere the hour for the rising was not known, so that to call upon the men of Rowpoor now would do no good to the cause, and would lead to swift punishment at the

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hands of English troops. With desperate courage, therefore, and with the determination to reach the roof and slay whoever might be there, the native general ran at the stairs and sprang up several steps at a bound.

"Up! Follow me!" he cried, drawing his tulwar and raising it above his head.

Encouraged by his boldness the others advanced and began to mount after him.

"Steady!" whispered Claude. "Stand a little aside, Reg, while I let out with my fist. You take the second man."

By now Indoo Khan was nearing the top, and slackened his pace to pick his steps in the darkness. He was in the act of passing through the doorway when Claude's fist swished through the air, and missing the general's head by the breadth of a hair, expended the force of a mighty blow in the air. Reg was more fortunate. As the crafty conspirator drew back with a cry of alarm, and lifted his tulwar to cut down his invisible opponent, he shot out a sinewy right arm, and, putting all the strength of a muscular shoulder into the blow, struck the general full upon the chest. There was a thud, a shriek of terror, and Indoo Khan shot backward from the stairway, and, falling clear of his followers, went sprawling to the floor below, where he lay stunned.

For a moment his fellow-conspirators paused, and then, with a shout of rage, they rushed up the stairway and threw themselves upon the lads.

Thud! This time Claude's blow went home. He struck the first of the attackers upon the face and felled him like an ox. The second stumbled over his comrade in the darkness, and ere he could recover himself Reg stepped nimbly down,

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and, catching him by the shoulders, hurled him down upon his comrades. What followed would have been ludicrous at any other time. Expecting to meet with little resistance, the enemy came rushing up, tulwar in hand, when they were suddenly stopped by the weight of the falling man. It was too much for their strength, and though they clung frantically to the woodwork with their disengaged hands, they were swept away like flies, and, rolling and tumbling over one another, went in a heap to the ground.

"Phew! That was warm work," whispered Claude rapidly. "What luck for us that the light burns below, for while it does we can see them the instant they move, whereas we are in black darkness. If I were leading those fellows I should douse the candles. But we must get away from this, for those villains will be rushing us again. Have a look round, Reg. Perhaps you may hit upon some means of escape."

"Right! Just whistle when you want me," was the answer. Slipping into the darkness, Reg ran to the parapet of the tower, and with one hand upon it to guide himself, rapidly passed round the walls. Suddenly his legs came into contact with a baulk of wood, and, losing his balance, he fell forward upon some hard object.

"George! That hurt," he exclaimed. "A gun. That is no use to us." Feeling along the baulk, he found the edge, and commenced to pass beyond it. Then his fingers struck against a ring, and passed from that to a hook, at the end of which was a cable. It was the lashing used to keep the gun from springing back too far when discharged, and at once its value occurred to him.

"There are several turns of it," he murmured excitedly.

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"If it is all in one piece it will suit our purpose admirably, and even if it is in short lengths we can knot them together. Ah! That's good. It's one long rope with a hook at the end. Hurrah! Now for a climb over the wall."

Dragging the cable after him, he returned to Claude's side and touched him on the shoulder.

"We're in luck," he whispered. "How goes it with those beggars?"

"They are beginning to pull themselves together. At first the fall knocked them silly; but they have shaken the stars out of their eyes by now, and will be making another rush in a minute. Indoo Khan hasn't stirred since you sent him flying."

"A minute, you said!" exclaimed Reg. "Then come along old man, I've captured a rope which is long enough to take us to the battlements below. Now, let's be quick about it. Those fellows are preparing, but they will come more cautiously this time, and it will take a few minutes for them to discover that there is no one here to oppose them."

With one more glance down the stairway, Claude followed his brother across the roof.

"Now for a ring to fix the hook in," he said. "Here it is; make fast, Reg."

"That does it, Claude. Now we'll take a turn round the gun, and there goes the end over the wall. Who'll go first?"

"I will. When the rope is slack follow quickly."

Without hesitation Claude crept into the embrasure, squeezed beneath the muzzle of the gun, and, taking firm hold of the cable, started to descend. It was an uncanny sensation to be hanging high up there in the dark, beating his heels against

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the stonework and dangling his feet in space. But Claude was a lad who had crammed many adventures into his young life. Not once, but many times, had he clambered hastily from a tree when the approach of some unfriendly gamekeeper warned him to be content with the eggs he had already taken. Yes, away in Old England, where he had been sent from India to school, he and his brother had thrown themselves heart and soul into every game, every sport that helps to foster manliness in our race. Was he, then, a cricketer, a good horseman, and a dashing young soldier, to hesitate now? Certainly not! For what was the danger when compared with that of ten minutes ago?

"It's a precious thin rope," he thought. "But I'm fairly over the battlements now, and must take my chance. Here goes."

Lowering himself hand over hand it was not long before his feet touched a projection over the doorway of the tower. A moment's pause, and then he slid silently to the ground, where he stood staring up at the dark edge of the battlements above, and listening with all his ears for sounds from within.

"Would Reg never come?" he asked himself anxiously. "Had he been captured by the conspirators, and cut to pieces by their cruel tulwars? Why did he not climb down the rope?"

The suspense was most trying, and Claude was even contemplating an attempt at scaling the rope again when he dimly perceived a figure leaning over the parapet above. At the same moment there was the patter of feet within, the wooden stairs creaked, and the conspirators once more rushed to the attack.

Claude heard them pause in doubt, and encourage one

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another to push on. Then the voice of one of the fakirs drowned the others, and, calling loudly to them, he dashed at the doorway above and emerged upon the roof, where he stood lashing the darkness with his tulwar.

Meanwhile Reg had slid rapidly down the rope, and soon stood at his brother's side.

"Home! Let us get out of this as quickly as possible," said Claude. "This way, and when we come to the sentry stroll slowly up to him and pretend that we have seen and heard nothing. You may depend upon it he is hand-in-glove with those scoundrels."

Accordingly they ran lightly along the battlements until within a hundred yards of the sentry, then, having paused to regain breath, strolled forward at an easy pace.

"Halt!" cried the man again. "Who walks about at night?"

"The English sahibs," answered Claude.

"Good! The countersign, I pray you, sahib."

"Delhi."

"So it is, sahib. Pass below. But wait. Did you see aught yonder upon the walls?"

"We saw all we came here for," said Claude quietly. "The moon rising over yon mountains was grand. I could stand there for hours and gaze upon the scene."

"True, sahib," the man replied uneasily. "The view from the walls is like a dream after a pilgrimage. But tell me, did you see no one? Did you not meet men walking?"

"The man is ill," cried Claude. "Men walking? Why do you ask, when you who stand here at the only stairway must know better than I? You are dreaming, fellow."

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"Sahib, I know not why I asked," said the sentry, with ill-disguised satisfaction at hearing that the Englishmen had met none of the conspirators. "But tell me, my masters—the blood flows through my veins with such swiftness and sings in my ears so loudly that it confuses me,—did you hear sounds? The cries of men fighting?"

"Sounds! Yes, we heard those," replied Claude. "A cart creaked down in the town, and men came out and cried to those who moved it. Perhaps robbers were abroad. What of it then? Have you done with your questions?"

"Yea, sahibs. I thank you. Of a truth my wits are wandering this night. Good-night, and may the gods you worship shield you in your sleep!"

He tossed his musket into his right hand and saluted, standing rigid and erect as the two lads passed. A minute later they were in the open air. But not even then did they forget their nonchalance. To have taken to their heels now would have been a fatal mistake, for it would have aroused the watchful sentry's suspicions, and, more important than that, had friends of the conspirators been at hand any sign of haste might have led to capture. As it was, however, they strolled away from the gateway in a leisurely manner, and it was not till they were far in the open that they ventured to quicken their pace. Arrived at the bungalow they threw themselves into lounges which lay beneath the punkahs in the drawing-room, and shouted loudly first to the kitmagar (butler) to bring them refreshment, and then to the punkah-wallah, bidding him pull at his rope and fan their heated bodies.

"Phew! The night is cooler than most," cried Claude, "but after that—well, I fancy an icicle would melt. I'm all of

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a quiver, and, by Jove! I'm covered with blood from head to foot. Lucky it was so dark, or the sentry would have seen. He would have smelled a rat at once."

He stood beneath the lamp and looked at his clothes with some concern, for they were torn and dirtied by contact with the walls of the tower, while spots and streaks of blood bespattered the front.

"You owe that to the fellow you struck," laughed Reg. "'Pon my word, that blow in the face should last him for a lifetime, while as for Indoo Khan, I fancy he is feeling very sorry for himself. But seriously, Claude, what is to be the end of the matter? We've escaped by the skin of our teeth from a pickle, and here we are with what would appear to be information as to a general rebellion which is to sweep India from north to south, and kill all of our race, or drive them from these shores."

"Drive whom? What race do you allude to, my boy? What is this precious information?" suddenly asked a voice.

"Hullo! That you, Uncle?" sang out Claude.

"Of course it is," said the major, entering from the veranda, where he had been sitting. Then, as he caught sight of the lads, and noticed their tattered appearance, he stopped abruptly and eyed them critically.

"Skylarking?" he asked. "No, you are both too sensible to play pranks in the presidency of Rowpoor, where you are put to set an example. What is it?"

"Trouble with Indoo Khan, Uncle," answered Claude. "He has done his best to kill both Reg and me."

"Indoo Khan! Kill you both! Why, how could he? Where is he now?"

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"If not recovered from the blow that knocked him down, he is now lying stunned at the bottom of a flight of steps which leads to the summit of one of the watch-towers of Row-poor," said Claude lightly.

"Come! Do not speak in riddles," cried the major impatiently. "What is this trouble? Bless the boy, there is blood on his clothes!"

"And look at my fist," burst in Reg. "That's the effect of a native's front teeth."

He showed the back of his hand, where a line of dark blood had congealed across the knuckles.

"I can see you have been in the wars," said the major. "Surely Indoo Khan has not attempted violence to revenge his defeat to-day."

"No, Uncle. But he and a gang of conspirators did their utmost to kill us, for by the merest chance we contrived to hear them plotting a mutiny. And it's a serious business. It seems that the rising is to be general. The English are to be swept out of the country."

Then, taking up the tale, Claude narrated how he and Reg had gone to the tower to watch the moonlight as it bathed the slopes of the Himalayas, and how the native general had arrived to disturb them.

"No wonder your lives were in peril," said Major Watson thoughtfully. "I am not surprised to hear, too, that there is a serious conspiracy afoot, for your news only bears out the truth of the warning I gave you. Indeed, my only cause of astonishment is that you two lads have returned to tell the tale; for with such a stake to win Indoo Khan and his wretched accomplices would murder hundreds of Englishmen

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rather than have their plans upset, and their ultimate success jeopardized.

"Now, let me think the matter over," continued the major, sinking into a chair and drumming upon the table with his fingers. "What action should I take? My first thought was to ride down to Rowpoor at once and arrest all concerned. But would that be the best course to pursue? Would it not rather be wiser to hold my hand, and to go on as if quite ignorant of this serious danger? A letter to the governor-general would spread a warning everywhere, and precautions might be taken to nip the rising in the bud, whereas, if I arrested Indoo Khan now, his confederates in other towns would take the alarm, and, as all is fully prepared, would break into mutiny before we were prepared for them. Yes, that, on second thoughts, seems the wiser course." I will send off a messenger at once, and we three will remain here and go to the shoot to-morrow as if still full of faith in the general and the soldiery. Tell me, Claude, did anyone recognize you? Will it be known who was upon the roof?"

"No, Uncle. Perhaps Indoo will have his suspicions. But we were always in the dark, and our voices were never heard. As we were cute enough to disarm the suspicions of the sentry it will be thought that Reg and I were on some other part of the battlements, and that we left the walls without seeing or hearing anything of the plotters and their fray."

"Then be careful to keep him in ignorance," said the major. "And now, boys, off to bed. I will write my despatches at once and send them by special messenger. Rise fresh and bright to-morrow, for we must do ourselves justice. It is a comfort to feel that, however treacherous the general may be, the

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Rajah is true to our cause and ready to back up those who have put him upon his throne. Good-night, Claude! Good-night, Reg! Sleep well, and forget your little adventure."

He shook them in turn by the hand. Then, retiring to his office, he sat down to write his letters. As for Claude and Reg, the reaction had now come after their exciting adventure upon the tower. The heat and the exertion combined had thoroughly tired them, and they went off, yawning, to their rooms, where, throwing themselves upon the open-work pallets, they were soon lulled to sleep by the monotonous swish, swish of the punkahs. And so soundly did they rest, and so deep and regular was their breathing, that before half an hour had passed the punkahwallah seated in the passage outside relaxed his grip of the rope. His chin settled upon his breast, and soon he too was in the land of dreams, from which it would have required some unusual noise to awake him.

"Sahib, awake! Sahib, the day will dawn ere you have partaken of chota hazaree. Awake!"

"Morning already!" yawned Claude. Then, sitting up and screwing his knuckles into his eyes, he exclaimed: "Hullo! What's the matter? Time to get up? Nonsense! It's still pitch-dark."

His eyes blinked at the flame of the candle, and he was on the point of lying down again, when a hand was thrust beneath the mosquito-curtain, and cold fingers gently touched his arm.

"Sahib, the shoot. Sahib, his highness, the Rajah goes to the forest in search of tiger to-day."

Claude was wide awake now, and with a muttered "Shoot. Ah, I remember now!" he sprang out of bed. Then once more

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the faithful Ikand attended to his toilet, and ere long our young hero had emerged from the tepid bath in which Anglo-Indians delight to indulge, and had arrayed himself in undress uniform. By now, too, Reg and the major were ready. After a hurried meal they jumped into a trap and drove down to Rowpoor, reaching its gate just as the first beams of the sun fell across the plain. In front of the palace a group of elephants were standing, and the hunters at once mounted to their seats in narrow howdahs. In front of this squatted the mahout, and behind sat the gun-bearer. Then the youthful Rajah appeared, and, saluting his English comrades, motioned to the cavalcade to proceed.

"These are fast beasts," sang out the major to his two nephews. "We shall be at the rendezvous in a little more than an hour, and when we have breakfasted we shall enter the jungle. How do you both feel? Queer, eh?"

"Not a bit of it, Uncle," they laughed.

"Good, my lads, let us see how you can shoot to-day. Ah, here comes our worthy general!"

At this moment Indoo Khan drew near upon an elephant, and, having saluted, smiled in a friendly manner. Evidently he had calmed his fears of instant arrest, and had decided that neither Claude nor Reg could have been amongst the listeners who had disturbed his meeting on the previous evening. Indeed, once he had regained consciousness, and persuaded his muddled brain to think, he had argued hotly with his confederates that the lads had not been in the tower.

"At first I suspected those English brats," he had said, "but now, having heard the evidence of the sentry who admitted them to the walls, I am sure they were at another

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part of the battlements. Perhaps we are unnecessarily frightened. It is more than probable that in going to the tower we unwittingly disturbed some evil persons, robbers no doubt. Yes, our plans are safe."

"But the blows," interposed one of his officers. "Surely men of our race do not strike with their fists."

"Who knows?" Indoo said. "Perhaps they used padded clubs. We know that robbers carry such an implement with which to batter in doors as silently as possible. Yes, I fancy I even saw a short stake whirling in the air."

The general had been drawing upon his imagination, but his words had the effect of calming the fears of all the conspirators. And now, having recovered in some measure from the terrific blow dealt him, and from his heavy fall upon the stone flooring, Indoo Khan had joined the shooting party, for to have been absent might have led to awkward questions.

"How slept the sahib after the action of yesterday morning?" he asked, approaching Claude.

"Well, I thank you, General."

"So? Then you will shoot straight to-day," was the answer.

At this moment the elephants quickened their pace and the party was scattered. Arrived at the river the ponderous animals waded through, and, pushing on, soon reached a forest bivouac, where tents had been pitched and preparations made for the reception of the sportsmen.

"I hope to show you a fine tiger to-day," said the Rajah. "My beaters, to the number of three hundred, have surrounded him, and even now they are slowly closing towards us. Let us hasten with our meal and set forward again."

No persuasion was needed, for all were excited at the

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prospect of shooting a tiger. Half an hour, therefore, had scarcely passed when the hunters finished breakfast. Guns were then looked to and carefully loaded, and they mounted to their howdahs again and set out for a clearing in the jungle. Arrived there, they formed in line and waited, guns at full cock, and ears and eyes alert.

"There! You can hear the shouts of the beaters," cried the major. "Watch for a movement in the grass, and fire the instant you see the tiger, for if you give him time to act he will probably break back and we shall lose him. What is that? Something is approaching through the undergrowth!"

He leant over the front of the howdah, a movement which all unconsciously copied. Then, gun in hand, ready to be brought rapidly to the shoulder, the party sat as rigid as rocks, scarcely daring to breathe lest the tiger for which they were in search should take the alarm, and dive back into the depths of the jungle.

CHAPTER IV

The Storm Bursts

SWISH, sw-i-i-sh! The crisp sound of reeds and long grass thrust aside by some passing body fell upon the ear, and drowned for the moment the babble of water splashing along the rocky bottom of a neighbouring jheel on its way to the forest swamps. Sw-i-i-sh! Yes, some creature was approaching the line of elephants, which stood in a more or less open spot. Swish! The animal upon which Claude is seated hears the sound, and flaps up his spade-like ears. He moves uneasily from side to side, and would turn about and fly were it not for the attentions of the mahout. Instead, his trunk goes up, and he trumpets shrilly. An answer comes from a hundred points far away in the jungle, where others of the Rajah's beasts are beating the bush, and then all sounds, the rustling grass, the gurgling stream, and even the shrill notes of the elephants are drowned by a nerve-shaking roar.

"Deko! (see). Deko, sahib! Sheer, sheer!" (a tiger) shouted the native shikarry seated behind Claude. "There! Deko!"

Reaching forward a long skinny arm he pointed at a portion of the jungle with his finger.

"I see nothing. Where is he?" asked Claude.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips when a second roar set the air trembling, and the elephants swaying still more

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uneasily from side to side. Then a streak of yellow flew up over the tall grass, and a magnificent striped tiger alighted in the open directly before Claude's elephant.

"Shoot, sahib, shoot!" screamed the native. "He is yours!"

Steadying himself with an effort, Claude lifted his rifle and rapidly sighted it for the tiger. Then he pressed the trigger ever so gently. The report was followed by a deafening roar, and the streak of yellow cut through the smoke. Bang! Another gun, the major's, sounded, and a spout of brown earth shot up from the ground just beneath the tiger. Once more Claude levelled his weapon, and, catching a glimpse of the tiger through the drifting smoke, fired just as the beast was preparing to spring upon the howdah. The bullet struck full upon the creature's shoulder, and, penetrating to his heart, dropped him like a stone. Next second tiger and gun were forgotten in the effort to maintain a seat in the howdah, for, terrified by the proximity of the tiger, the timid elephant swung round like a flash and bolted at his fastest pace.

"Back! Stop him!" cried Claude eagerly. "There may be more to shoot."

By dint of energetic application of his hook, the mahout at length persuaded the elephant to return, when Claude's friends crowded about him.

"Capital!" cried the major. "Come down and look at your prize. He is a magnificent specimen."

Climbing from the howdah Claude walked to the fallen tiger and inspected it with feelings of great satisfaction.

"See," said his uncle, "your first bullet struck it in the back and the second reached the heart. It was a lucky shot,

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and reflects great credit upon your nerve. If you had missed with the second barrel he would have been upon you in another moment, and then it would have been a bad business. As for myself, I made a wretched shot, and missed badly. But we have more sport ahead. Up you get again, and let us push on. Let us hope that the next will prove to be the man-eater for whom we have specially come out."

"Why, is this not the one then?" asked Reg as he turned to go to his howdah.

"No," answered the major decidedly. "This is a young but full-grown beast, in the best of health and strength. A man-eater is usually—in fact, nearly always—a lanky, thin old tiger, whose strength and wind are not what they were, and, finding his efforts at catching a deer or a buffalo unsuccessful, has taken to killing men, finding human beings a far easier prey. If we come across him he will probably show an ugly temper, so it will not do to miss him."

When the hunters had taken their places again in their several howdahs, the elephants pushed on through the bush. At times it was no easy matter to retain one's position, for the ground was soft, swamps and jheels cut across the path, and into them the massive beasts sank deeply, their efforts to wade through tossing those on their backs from side to side. At length, however, a level stretch of long grass was reached, the waving green often growing so high that the howdahs and the hunters in them alone were to be seen. Ten minutes later they emerged into a wide open space, and at once the shout "sheer!" went along the line.

"Where, where?" asked Claude eagerly.

"See, sahib, he rushed from the jungle to the left of the

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major sahib," was the answer. "Ah, hear him roar! Prepare to shoot, sahib."

"He's cutting along our front," called out the major. "Watch for him, for as likely as not he will break cover shortly."

Scarcely had he spoken when the grass before him was suddenly parted, and from out of the jungle crept a huge tiger, its jaws agape, and its fangs showing; while its tail swished stealthily from side to side. Pausing to steady his aim, Major Watson fired. The thud of the bullet was distinctly heard by Claude, who was a few yards to the right, and by Indoo Khan, whose elephant was posted on the left.

"Hit!" cried Claude excitedly, and, leaning over the front of the howdah, he looked at the fierce beast, expecting him to fall. But the wound was not a mortal one, and even as he looked the tiger gathered his limbs beneath his body, and, springing high in the air, launched himself at his enemy. The leap took him on to the forehead of the elephant, where he clung, his long and terrible claws tearing the poor beast. Instantly, and with a shrill, almost human shriek of pain, the elephant plunged forward upon his knees in his endeavour to free himself of his tormentor, and as Claude looked, tiger, mahout, and his uncle were precipitated to the ground.

"Shoot!" shouted Claude. "Shoot, General! He is within your reach."

Instead of answering the cry with a shot, Indoo Khan paused for a moment irresolute, and then a fiendish smile overspread his face.

"Nay," he said to himself, "nay, Indoo Khan will watch



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THE TIGER SPRINGS UPON THE MAJOR'S ELEPHANT

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while the tiger slays the chief of his enemies. But he will make pretence to help."

Had he acted willingly to help the major, and fired promptly, he could easily have killed the tiger. But instead, he only levelled his rifle, and then halted as if irresolute, or fearful of shooting the major. As for Claude, the kneeling elephant partly obscured his view, and at the distance he was from the scene a hasty shot would have been simply madness. He therefore still leaned forward in the howdah, a prey to the most terrible fears.

"Shoot, General!" he cried again. "Why do you not shoot? Quick, or the major sahib will be slain."

"I know, and may it be so," was Indoo Khan's cruel answer, muttered beneath his breath. "Let his death come swift and fast, and then indeed fortune will have played into my hands."

Meanwhile the mahout, who had fallen lightly, had sprung to his feet and fled for his life. Major Watson, however, lay prone upon the ground, unable to move, for his thigh was broken. He contrived, however, to grasp his rifle, which lay close at hand, and endeavoured to lift it to his shoulder. But he was unsuccessful, and ere he could repeat the attempt the tiger was upon him.

"He will be killed! How awful!" gasped Claude, closing his eyes. Then, made desperate by the position, he hastily sighted his rifle and pulled the trigger. When the smoke cleared away the major still lay prone upon the grass, while the tiger was stretched out some feet away, where he had sprung in his death agony. His lanky limbs twitched spasmodically, and his tongue lolled between his teeth.

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"Hurrah! A fine shot! Saved!" shouted Reg. "Hurrah, Claude, old chap! You have saved him."

"Ah, a bad omen! The sons of Sheitan have triumphed," groaned Indoo Khan. "I thought his hour had come, and that nothing could have saved him. Truly there is much that is fine in these English, for who else would have lived through such a danger, and where else could one find a youth willing to risk the slaying of a blood relative by his own hand? Yea, the British are a mighty people, but a foolish, and in India their end draws near."

Indoo Khan scrambled from his howdah to the ground, and ran towards the fallen major. "Does he live, our beloved major sahib?" he asked of those around, feigning the utmost concern. "Has the tiger crushed the life out of his body?"

For a moment no one spoke, and then, turning slowly upon him, Claude answered:

"He lives, but you had no work in the rescue. You alone were in position to fire the shot that should save him, and yet you would not. How is it that you held your fire?"

He asked the question and faced the general sternly, while Reg and the youthful Rajah repeated it.

"Speak!" said the latter harshly. "Why did you not shoot? The major sahib's life was in your hands, and you would not help."

For a moment a look of terror spread over Indoo Khan's features, and then they brightened as he remembered that he had a ready and sufficient excuse.

"Your highness," he replied, with a deep salaam, "would that I had done as you say I should. But I could not. Fear that I might shoot the major sahib stayed my hand, and I

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stood there fearing to fire, unable to move or speak, while I watched the horrible scene."

"The general of my forces should have more faith in himself," the Rajah replied curtly. "However, the major sahib lives. Come, let us carry him back to Rowpoor."

The alarming accident to Major Watson, and his extremely narrow escape from death, put a sudden end to the shooting, and straightway preparations were made for a return.

"We shall have to lift him upon a pad elephant, and carry him so till we get out of the jungle," said Claude. "After that a cart will best serve our purpose. I pray your highness that men be sent to make all ready. Meanwhile you and I, Reg, must do some rough surgery. We must bandage the leg to a splint. Now, how do you feel, Uncle?"

"Better than I could have thought it possible, Claude. The jar seems to have numbed me from the thigh downwards. That idea of a splint is a good one, and I advise that some of those strong reeds be cut down and roughly tied together. They are light, and yet very rigid."

He pointed to a thick growth near at hand, and, falling in with his wishes, Claude and Reg at once secured an armful. Six of the lightest and best were selected and cut into five-foot lengths, and these were tied loosely together, side by side. Pads of soft young grass and moss were then placed along the major's side, thigh, and leg, and the splint applied. Strips from a turban secured the whole. When the uninjured leg had been secured in the same manner to its fellow, the major was ready for his journey.

"You'll have to take me easily," he said faintly. "The pain

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is getting severe now, and I do not feel that I can bear much jolting."

Lifting him very carefully, the two lads, with many willing helpers, carried him to the elephant, which was forced to kneel. Then he was hoisted up and secured to the pad, an ample layer of grass being spread beneath him. This done the animal rose and stalked off through the jungle, and in due course the injured man was brought to his bungalow.

"You'll have to move me on at once," said the major an hour or two later, when he was feeling stronger. "This is a break that wants the attention of something better than a native apothecary, and if I am to make a good recovery I must be put under the care of an English surgeon. Now, what should be done? Patna is our nearest garrison, and that is fifty miles away. Yes, I will go there. Will you make the arrangements, Claude, for I ought to leave Rowpoor at nightfall?"

"And who will go with you, Uncle?" asked Claude.

"My kitmagar and servants. At first I thought that you or Reg might keep me company, but just now it is out of the question, for these are dangerous times, lads. Yes, a serious movement is afoot, and the state of Rowpoor must on no account be left without its English advisers. Listen, and mark my words. Until another officer of equal rank can replace me, I put you jointly in charge of the post of dewan, and I know you will not desert it easily. Stand by the little Rajah. He is true to the British, and will hold to you. If you are near at hand, and this sign of which we have heard comes, your presence may save the state and the Rajah's life. Whatever you do, keep a wary eye upon Indoo Khan. You

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have told me how he left me to be killed to-day, and you saw his meeting with his fellow-conspirators last night. Watch him, therefore, and at the first sign of mutiny, if he even makes the smallest movement to lead the native troops astray, arrest him or shoot him.

"But there, you both have your heads screwed pretty firmly upon your shoulders, and I can trust you to act for the best. Now, see to my removal; and, by the way, before I forget it, never move about unarmed. To do so is to court disaster nowadays."

There was no doubt that Major Watson was intensely in earnest, and both Claude and Reg were impressed by his words.

"It is an important charge he has put in our hands," said Claude when they had withdrawn, "and we will try to carry out his duties as he would wish. Of course, if trouble comes, we must stand by the little Rajah, and do our best to defeat Indoo Khan and his rascally plotters."

"And the surest way of doing that will be to carry weapons, as Uncle suggested," burst in Reg. "Fists suited our purpose well enough the other night, but the sight of a revolver is often sufficient to cow a native. I vote for carrying a pair always."

This was certainly an excellent idea in the special circumstances, for there was no doubt that a mutiny might break out at any moment. Then, even to this out-of-the-way part of the world sinister rumours had reached, and the air was full of foreboding. Not that the natives felt it, or showed the slightest distress. Indeed, both at Rowpoor and where English officers ruled them in greater numbers, the

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sepoys seemed to be more than content. True, growls about the cartridges issued and the method of greasing them had been heard on every hand. But then the ridiculous side of the question had been put to the natives, and they seemed pleased with the explanation. They had been assured that no attempt was being made to disturb their religious peculiarities, and with that they had gone back to their quarters, seemingly happy in the thought that their precious "caste" was perfectly safe.

But it was a false calm. All this content and happiness was assumed, and while the sepoys went on with their duties with the regularity of clockwork, their English officers amused themselves, as they well knew how to do, and never dreamt that there was a mine beneath their feet, never even suspected that the sepoys, whom they had trained so carefully, were already treacherously engaged in firing the fuse, and were even now cleaning their guns and sharpening their sabres and tulwars in preparation for the long-expected signal, when with fiendish cries and ruthless thoughts they would rush out to slay, slay till they wearied of it, till every man and woman and child boasting of English blood had been exterminated. And then? What was the prospect before them? Few, indeed, thought; scarcely one imagined that punishment would come. It was to be a holy war, a war of extermination, and when it was done a native king would reign, the English would be forgotten, and the population of India would settle down to its old squalid existence, forgetting all the good that their late masters had taught them.

Two days after the major had gone by road to Patna, the lads were sitting on the veranda of the bungalow watching

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the stars dreamily, and, to tell the truth, feeling somewhat forlorn and lonely, when a sudden blaze of light leapt up from Rowpoor, and loud shouts filled the air.

"What is that?" asked Claude quickly. "A house on fire, or a heap of rubbish?"

"Can't say, old chap; but they'd scarcely shout for rubbish. Hullo! That's queer. It sounds like a perfect pandemonium. The town seems to have been thrown into a frenzy."

"I don't like it," said Claude with emphasis. "Supposing the sign has come! Supposing it is mutiny!"

There was no answer, for the same thought had flashed through Reg's mind, but he hesitated to give it expression. However, the appearance of the barber Ikand, who had been for long with the major, cleared up the mystery.

"Quick, sahibs!" he cried, rushing towards them, and forgetting all ceremony, even a salaam, in his haste. "The soldiers are rising. They clamour to be led against the English troops, and already they have sent men to slay you! Rise! Fly, sahibs, while there is yet time!"

"And the Rajah?" asked Claude, rising from his chair. "What of him? How are the rebels treating him?"

"But badly, sahib. Indeed he is doomed, for at this moment he is a prisoner within his palace while the general deliberates with his officers. When you are brought there—if those who come do not slay you at once—both of you and the Rajah will be killed. Those are the words of the people, for I heard them but half an hour ago. Fly, then, sahibs! The Rajah is doomed, and you, too, will die if you do not leave at once."

"That I will never do," answered Claude in a quiet but

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resolute voice. "If the Rajah is in danger I will go to help him no matter how many soldiers are rebellious."

"Spoken like yourself, old boy!" cried Reg. "I'll back you up through thick and thin."

He strode to his brother's side, pale and quivering with excitement, but with a mien that was no less determined than Claude's.

"Good! I knew you would," said the latter, still in that same quiet and resolute voice which had come so suddenly to him. "Now, how are we to proceed? I vote we ride straight for the palace, and carry off the day by bluff. Bring your pistols, Reg, and use them if there is occasion. For my part, I will shoot whoever dares to disobey me, even though he be the general. Now, let us fill our pockets, and begone. Ikand, run to the stables and bring out our ponies. When we have gone, saddle two more, and ride them quietly down to that tope of trees which stands some three hundred yards from the gate of Rowpoor. We will leave these there too. If you can, bring provisions and wine, and in any case be cautious and silent."

"But, sahibs, your lives!" cried Ikand, prostrating himself. "You will be killed, and that after all my hopes of saving you. Fly! Do not stay, I beseech you, for death awaits you surely in Rowpoor! Ah! listen, there are the cries of those who come to take you!"

As he spoke a babel of sounds came from the plain which stretched from the compound of the bungalow to Rowpoor, while dancing high in the air were some score of flaring torches which the mutineers bore to light the way. Claude gave one quick look in their direction, and then turned to

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Ikand again, his resolution to return to Rowpoor unshaken.

"As you are a faithful servant, do as I command you," he said sternly. "For myself I will face the music."

"And I too. We'll stick to the little Rajah."

"Very well, Reg; now come along and get those cartridges. Ikand, be off to the stable. We will follow you there in a minute."

Running to the room kept as an armoury, the lads filled their breeches pockets with cartridges for the revolvers, which had just been introduced, and then, snatching cloaks and swords, ran out through the back of the bungalow. Arrived at the stables they found Ikand waiting with the horses.

"The syces and all the other boys are gone, sahibs," he whispered, his teeth chattering with excitement and terror. "Sahibs, farewell! If you will go to Rowpoor your doom is certain. But I will wait where you have appointed, and when you do not come I will ride to take the tidings to the major sahib. Farewell!"

"Bother the fellow's croaking!" cried Claude, angered by Ikand's constant warnings, and yet in his heart gratified by his faithful behaviour. "Come along, Reg. For the palace!"

Never did a youthful couple set out upon a more desperate or more reckless enterprise. Days before, they had had warning that a plot for a rising was afoot, and the words of the conspirators had told them that when the signal came the three Europeans were to be instantly set upon; and then would come the turn of the little Rajah. And here were the two lads galloping into the very heart of the mutineers, spurred on by a feeling of duty, that devotion to a trust

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which has caused so many gallant Englishmen to risk and to lose their lives.

"We promised to stand by him," gasped Claude as they flew over the ground, "and, by Jove! we'll do it. If he is to be saved we will manage it, and then we'll ride hard for the nearest garrison."

"We will," echoed Reg with equal spirit. "We'll just show these beggars that we are not afraid of them. Look here, Claude, old man, it will not do to blunder or make mistakes just now, for our lives are at stake, and therefore I propose that you take charge of this little matter. It's your place as the elder, and you're better and quicker at thinking than I am. Just you give your orders, and I'll obey, whatever the cost."

"Right! There's no doubt that one must lead, to avoid any muddling, Reg, and as you say, the consequences would be serious if we did not both follow the same line of action. You've asked me to act as captain, as the older of the two. I will. Stick to me, as I know you can, and, by George! we'll come out of it alive. Once more let me repeat my words about shooting. If anyone refuses to obey us, cover him with your shooter. If that does not have the desired effect, let drive. The deed will be a necessary and a righteous one. Ah, there is the tope of trees! Steady! Pull up and dismount!"

The conversation had been carried on in gasps as they galloped through the darkness; but now they had reached their first stage, and promptly dismounted.

"We'll tie them up fast and take a breather for a moment," said Claude. "Then we shall be fresh for the job before us. Hullo! what is that?"

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As he asked the question a sheet of flame seemed to leap suddenly into the night from the direction of the bungalow from which they had just galloped, and instantly a storm of jubilant shouts and cries arose. Someone had fired the building, for now the flames burnt with such fierceness, licking about the dry woodwork of which the bungalow was built, that the darkness was dispelled for a circle of a hundred yards, in which a mixed crew of uniformed sepoy and half-naked natives surged, rushing frantically hither and thither, and shouting at the top of their voices.

"The brutes!" exclaimed Reg. "They've burnt us out of house and home."

"Perhaps all the better for us," remarked Claude suddenly. "It is probable that they imagine we are hidden in the roof somewhere, and therefore will think that we are destroyed. If that is the case they and their comrades who have remained in the town will scarcely expect us to be out here, and we shall have the advantage of complete surprise when we reach the palace. Look over there! Thousands are lining the walls, and no doubt enjoying the spectacle of our destruction. Come back, Reg. Let us dive well into the centre of these trees, or we might be seen against the fire."

He turned and pointed for a moment at the walls of Row-poor, which were within three hundred yards of them. Even at that distance, helped by the reflection of the blazing bungalow and by some conflagration near the town, it was possible to see some thousands of dark gesticulating figures which stood out clearly in the darkness on the battlements.

"Yes, they are enjoying the scene," went on Claude bitterly. "Let them. May the bungalow keep aflame still longer for our

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sakes, for then their attention will be thoroughly occupied. Now for the palace, Reg. Are you still determined to go on with the matter?"

"Yes, of course," was the ready answer. "To the palace!"

"Then forward!" said Claude quietly. "Forward, and with God's help we will save the Rajah and his State."

He said the words very solemnly, and before moving held out his hand and grasped Reg's in the darkness.

"Good luck to us, old chap!" he whispered steadily. "Whatever comes we'll keep our faces to the enemy, and do as all of our countrymen would wish."

Reg shook his brother's hand heartily, and they started forward. Then, side by side, with the butts of their weapons close to their hands and their sword-hilts firmly grasped, they marched direct for the entrance gateway of Rowpoor. Never was such a forlorn hope as theirs. Never did two young Englishmen face one more boldly. Indeed, as foes abounded everywhere, and force could be of little avail, both recognized that strength of purpose, an unyielding and resolute front, and an appearance of unlimited confidence in themselves would gain for them more than a regiment of soldiers could hope to obtain. With heads in air, therefore, and a swaggering lordly gait, which each unconsciously adopted, they crossed the open space between the tope of trees and the walls of Rowpoor, and did not halt till a huge gateway, studded with iron nails, barred their farther progress.

"Now for it!" said Claude quietly. "Come to the wicket, Reg, and when it is opened cover the fellow there. It is just as likely that only one will be in charge, for the others will

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have climbed aloft to make the most of their first triumph away at the bungalow."

He glanced above for a moment, and saw the same confused crowd of native soldiers, but now less clearly than before, for the light was failing as the bungalow burnt out. Then he lifted his sword, and brought the hilt sharply against the door.

"Open!" he cried in Hindostani. "Open quickly! There is one without who would speak with the general."

"Who desires to enter?" a voice from within replied. "Your name and your business?"

"Open and I will tell you," Claude cried back. "Hasten, fellow, for my news is of importance, and if you delay me trouble will fall upon you. Open! and when within I will whisper my business in your ear, for it has to do with the success of our cause elsewhere."

At the words the man within pricked up his ears, and being eager to hear of the doings of the mutineers in other parts, thrust his key into the lock, and, wrenching it round with all his force, dragged the wicket wide open.

CHAPTER V

At Duty's Call

WHAT is this great news? What tidings do you bring? Speak!" cried the sentry, holding the wicket and standing in the doorway. "Come, all within are eager to learn the fortunes of our comrades."

"One moment, fellow. You are impatient," answered Claude. "Stand aside while we enter."

He stepped over the low edge of the massive door and was passing in through the wicket, when the sentry suddenly became suspicious.

"What is this?" he asked angrily. "You do not speak our tongue as others do. Ah! you are the sahib!"

In a moment he recognized Claude, for the rays from a distant torch fell upon the lad's face. Then, stepping back, he was in the act of shouting for help when the muzzle of a revolver touched his ear and silenced him.

"Cry out and you are dead!" said Claude sternly. "Now," he continued, addressing the shivering sentry, who seemed quite overcome by terror, "tell me where are those others who form the guard. Speak the truth if you wish to live."

"They are above, watching the flames," faltered the sentry. "Sahib, spare me, for I have had no hand in this trouble!"

"Silence! Do not speak unless to answer my questions. Where is the Rajah? Who is at the palace?"



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"CRY OUT AND YOU ARE DEAD!" SAID CLAUDE STERNLY

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"His highness is a prisoner within his audience-chamber," was the reply. "Only the general, Indoo Khan, and some few of the officers are at the palace."

"Where? The palace has many rooms," said Claude.

"In that next the audience-chamber, I have heard, sahib."

"Then we will go there, Reg," said Claude coolly, turning to his brother. "Get hold of that key. Now close the door to, but do not lock it."

"And what about this fellow?" asked Reg.

"I have thought of him. If we were to leave him he would fly to his comrades, and our case would be hopeless. He shall come to the palace. Now," he said, grasping the trembling sentry by the arm, "lead us to his highness, and play no tricks. Remember that there is a weapon behind you."

The man needed no second warning, for a glimpse of Claude's determined face had overawed him. Besides, he was dumfounded at the audacity that had brought the two young sahibs to Rowpoor. In great fear for his life, therefore, and filled with wonder and amazement, he stepped from beneath the dark archway and led the way to the palace steps. No one was to be seen. Not a solitary individual accosted the little party. But on either side and from behind them cries could be heard in the darkness, and now and again figures could be seen upon the walls. Soon the entrance to the palace appeared before them, and at a touch from Claude's hand the native stopped.

"You will walk directly to his highness," said Claude. "If you come across guards you will give us warning, and if there is trouble you will stand aside while we see to it. Do you understand me?"

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"I do, sahib. I will be faithful to you," answered the sentry meekly.

"Then get ahead," said Claude shortly.

With the native a pace or two in advance, Claude and Reg passed through the palace entrance and plunged into the long corridor that led to the interior. It was unlighted, but soon they entered another, which was brilliantly illuminated, and here they came upon one of the palace guards, who was armed with a tulwar. Seeing the two English youths, whom he had thought to be dead by this time, he halted abruptly and gave a cry of astonishment. Then, fancying that they were in his power, and had come to the palace in ignorance of what had occurred, he gave a shout of savage exultation, and drawing his tulwar with a swish, cast the scabbard to the floor and rushed at the sahibs.

"Death to the feringhees!" he cried, and then was upon them.

"Death to yourself!" cried Reg, taking a hasty aim with his revolver and firing. "That will stop you."

It proved indeed to be a lucky shot, for, striking the Hindu in the forehead, the bullet stopped his headlong rush and brought him clattering to the tiles, where he rolled over upon his back and lay still, with arms widely outstretched.

"His own fault," said Claude calmly. "It was a good shot, Reg, and was made in the nick of time. Had the fellow reached us he might easily have given a nasty wound. Now forward."

Once more the three pushed on, and, passing through the corridor, thrust aside the heavy curtains which closed in the audience-chamber. Two guards who stood just within, started

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back. Ere they could make a movement or open their lips a weapon was pointed at each.

"Drop your tulwars," said Claude sternly. "Now stand over there with this man. We will shoot the first that moves."

"Claude sahib," a voice cried at this moment, and, springing from the divan on which he had thrown himself in his despair, the Rajah of Rowpoor advanced with outstretched hands and a look of thankfulness in his eyes.

"What is this?" he cried eagerly. "I thought I was alone, in the hands of Indoo Khan and his fellow rebels. I imagined that my two English friends had long ago been slain, and now you come to me, alive and well."

Then, as the risk they ran occurred to him, he started as if he had been struck.

"But this is madness!" he murmured. "You have come for your deaths. Surely you do not know that my general and my subjects are in rebellion, and that there is a price upon your heads. Even my life is at stake, and I expect at every moment to be killed. Not that I fear death. Without my rights life would be a burden. But you, why have you come?"

"Because it was our duty to do so," answered Claude steadily. "My uncle placed us jointly in charge of his post of dewan, and we promised to support you to the end."

"But that has come," cried the Rajah earnestly. "Fly now, for you can do nothing."

"We can rescue your highness," said Claude. "If your troops are in mutiny and your life in danger, you can fly with us, and later the English will help you back to your own."

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Perhaps it is even possible to overawe the general now, and so nip the whole rebellion in the bud."

"It is out of the question," the Rajah replied emphatically. "Matters have gone too far for that, and there are too many against us to give hope of success. Our lives are all that we can hope to save, and even they, I fear, are hopelessly forfeited. Brave Englishmen! It was like you to return."

"Come," said Claude shortly. "If there is no hope for the State, escape with us at once. The future will set matters straight for you."

"I will, Claude sahib. I will return later, and then woe betide those who have led my soldiers astray!"

The Rajah crossed the room and joined Claude and Reg, who then turned to depart. First, however, the three men who had been unwilling witnesses of the scene were marched to the curtain, and there ordered to stand in readiness, for to have left them in the audience-chamber would have been to risk almost instant pursuit.

"You will retire with us," said Claude, addressing them, "and you will not venture to leave us till I permit you. There, stand as you are, and pass on when I order you. Now, your highness, are you ready?"

"Quite," the Rajah responded. "Quick, Claude sahib, for every moment I expect my enemies to return."

Accordingly the order was given for the three men to pass through the curtain, and Claude and his two companions were on the point of following, when rapid footsteps were heard, and four native officers burst into the room. The leader was the faithless general, Indoo Khan, and, catching sight of Claude and Reg, he at once started forward to capture

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them. "Seize them!" he cried. "Kill them before they can escape."

"Halt! If you move I fire," said Claude, advancing a pace to meet him and covering him with his revolver. Then as the general stopped abruptly, hesitating how to act, Claude continued speaking.

"Listen to me, Indoo Khan," he cried, fixing his eyes sternly upon him. "You have broken into mutiny against the English power, and have led the troops astray. In addition to that you boast that you are about to take the place of the Rajah. For that you would be hanged at any time, and if I did rightly I should shoot you now. But I do not love killing men in cold blood, and therefore you shall have a chance for your life. Give up your arms, and order the mutineers to do the same, and I promise that your punishment shall be light. Refuse, and I will shoot you."

For a minute the two faced one another, the general's face working and twitching in an ugly manner all the while as he endeavoured to pluck up his courage, while Claude's wore a stern and very resolute look. Never once did he take his eyes from Indoo Khan's, and it was well for him that he did not, for he had a crafty villain to deal with, and one who, now that he had been so far successful, was not likely to give up his plans without a struggle. Indeed, as Claude looked at him, Indoo Khan's fertile brain was running over the various advantages yet to be gained if he persevered, all of which would be irretrievably lost if he accepted Claude's offer.

"Surrender now to a boy, who is himself completely in my power!" he thought indignantly. "It is a game he is

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playing. His insolence is greater than I can understand, for he offers terms to me while surrounded by my friends who are his enemies. Insolent feringhee!"

Indeed, there was little doubt, when viewed in a calm and unbiassed manner, that Claude was attempting to ride the high horse with a vengeance. Not that he could be blamed for making such a gallant bid to restore the fallen Rajah's fortunes. For it must be remembered that he was dealing with men of the East, men who had learned to look up to the British, whose force of character and moral courage stood out prominently when compared with theirs. Many a time during the coming months of trial and danger was one Englishman to prove himself a match for a numerous gathering of natives. But here Claude had to deal with a man who was not entirely devoid of personal courage, and who, moreover, maddened at the thought of failure when so near attaining his ends, was ready to dare anything. In addition, the general of the Rajah's forces had developed a large store of cunning since he became the friend and associate of conspirators, and, drawing upon it now, he slowly slipped his hand into the cummerbund which encircled his body. An instant later he withdrew it with a loaded pistol, and, levelling it at Claude's head, pressed the trigger. At the same moment our hero discharged his weapon, the two reports occurring together, and setting the glass chandelier which was slung from the roof ringing loudly. When the smoke cleared away the general was supported in the arms of his officers, who were staunching the blood which poured from a wound in his shoulder. A moment later men were heard approaching, and a number of armed guards burst into the room.

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"Quick! Run for your lives!" cried Claude, and suiting the action to the words, he turned on his heel and, followed closely by Reg and the Rajah, dashed down the corridor. A sharp turn took them into the darkened one, and a few seconds later they were in the open.

"Now for the gate!" cried Claude. "Get the key ready, Reg, for we shall want it!"

As they ran down the entrance-steps of the palace a storm of cries echoed down the galleries, as the guards took up the pursuit. By the time the gateway was reached they were streaming into the open, and, catching a glimpse of the fugitives as they passed beneath a flaring torch, came racing after them.

"Now, through you get and lock the door!" cried Claude. "Done it, Reg? Then shy the key away, and let us take to our heels!"

Keeping close together the trio ran at their fastest pace across the plain, and in five minutes were at the top of trees which sheltered the ponies.

"Ikand! Where are you?" called Claude. "Ah! that is well. Bring out the horses."

As he spoke, a dark lanky figure appeared, and the faithful barber advanced towards them leading four animals. There was no time for talk. In fact, if they were to escape with their lives they must quit the spot at once, and therefore, springing into their saddles, Claude, Reg, and the Rajah set their horses in motion, and, applying their heels, went racing across the plain, Ikand following close behind them. They left the fortress of Rowpoor in a state of wild excitement. Lights flashed from battlements and towers, and shouts and

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cries resounded in the air. Then the big entrance-gate was forced open, and a horde of soldiers and civilians poured out, bent upon capturing the Englishmen and the youth who until that evening had proudly ruled as Rajah of the State.

"Let us pull up now and listen," said Claude as he and his comrades reached the main road from Rowpoor and came in sight of a fork from which two long broad lines of beaten earth stretched into the darkness, that to the left leading to Patna, while the other turned to the west, and ran in the direction of the province of Oudh, and of such towns as Benares, Allahabad, Cawnpore, and Lucknow, all destined to achieve lasting notoriety during the eventful months to come. "Listen! What is that?"

They had almost left the shouts of their pursuers behind, for the pace had been hot while it lasted. But now that they were halted, and the thud of their horses' hoofs no longer filled the air, the distant gallop of many horsemen fell upon their ears.

"The cavalry!" said Claude shortly. "We shall have to be very quick and very cunning if we are to outdistance those fellows. Remember, they ride lighter than we do as a rule, and they will not spare their mounts. The question now is which direction to take."

"Listen, sahib," Ikand suddenly burst in, springing to the ground and standing with his face in the direction of Rowpoor. "The horsemen have divided. Ikand can hear two parties, one of which rides to the left to strike the road to Patna, while the other aims at that which leads to the west, into the heart of Oudh. Surely the first will cut us off if we turn that way, for they will have but a short distance to ride."

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"He is right!" exclaimed Reg. "By riding west we shall have a better chance of throwing off our pursuers."

"Then the road to Oudh let it be," said Claude abruptly. "Come, there is no time to be lost."

Once more the little party set off, and, turning slightly to the right, rode along the high road to Oudh.

"We shall have one advantage over them!" cried Claude as they jogged along. "Those fellows who are after us are too keen on catching us to pull up and listen. They will just gallop ahead till they reach the road, and then they will draw rein and listen. We must keep very wide-awake and halt occasionally. If it were possible we might ride to one side or the other, but just hereabouts it is out of the question, for nullahs abound and our horses would be sure to trip in them in the dark. Hurrah! stick to it! I fancy we are getting the better of the cavalry."

A quarter of an hour later they drew rein again, and, moving off the road, hid beneath the deep shadows of a tope.

"Now, where are the enemy?" asked Reg. "Let us hope they have given up the pursuit."

"That is out of the question!" cried the Rajah. "Those men will hunt us to the heart of the kingdom of Oudh. Having broken into mutiny against their Rajah, and against the English, who are my masters, they will never rest content till they have slain me. Leave me now, I beg of you. You can no longer plead duty in remaining with me, for you have done all and more than the majority would have attempted. Leave me then, I beseech you. I will return quietly on the road and give myself up. Be sure that that will content them, and will aid you in your flight."

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Claude turned upon the youthful Prince quite angrily, but then, realizing the brave and unselfish thoughts that had prompted his proposal, he suddenly strode up to him and grasped his hand.

"Nobly spoken, your highness," he said, "but you must remember that you are speaking to Englishmen. Having gone so far in this matter, we do not mean to allow the fear of capture to break up our party. Think of our position less than an hour ago. You will admit that it was desperate when compared with this. Then do not ask to leave us. Stand by us as we have tried to do by you, and we will help one another."

"I will, Claude sahib!" exclaimed the Rajah warmly, touched by the devotion of his English comrades. "I place myself in your hands, and I promise to follow as a soldier should those who are in command."

"That is settled, then. Now about these fellows."

"Look! There they are! I can see them!" cried Reg at this moment, and, pointing down the road, he directed the eyes of all the party to some twenty horsemen, who were strung out in a long line, and whose figures could be plainly discerned. The sky had cleared considerably, and the light of a full moon was now streaming down upon the land, bathing the road, the wide plain on either side with its scattered patches of trees, and the horsemen galloping in pursuit in bright silvery beams.

"That looks well," said Claude, scrutinizing the scattered cavalry. "It is evidently a race with those fellows to come up first with their flying Rajah and his friends. We will make them pay dearly for it. Look here, all of you. If we

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turn our faces west again and gallop for our lives those horsemen will follow till they reach the nearest village, when they will obtain fresh animals, and so be able to come up with us. My advice is that we go for the whole lot now, and take them by surprise. We'll wait till a few have passed us, and then we'll suddenly dash out from the darkness. What do you all say to the plan?"

"It is a bold one," the Rajah answered. "If one of my generals had ordered it I should have thought him rash, but with you, Claude sahib, it is different. The occasion calls for rapid and energetic action."

"And I'm for it heart and soul," cried Reg eagerly, drawing his sword with a flourish. "Let us go tooth-and-nail for the beggars, and show them that we mean fight. It is, as you say, Claude, our best plan, for if we do not stop them they will ride on till they catch us, and will thoroughly rouse the country-people all around."

"The sahib speaks the truth," said Ikand gravely. "Strike now, and may your swords teach such a lesson as shall be remembered in Rowpoor till the day we return!"

"Then we're all agreed," exclaimed Claude. "Now get in line and back into the shadows as far as possible. When I give the word, gallop out and go for the beggars, but be careful to keep together. There, you take the centre, Prince, with Ikand beside you. Reg and I will take the sides. Now, swords out, and make ready."

Following his directions the little party withdrew into the shadows, and held their weapons in readiness; and meanwhile the twenty native horse continued their furious pursuit, the first half-dozen, who were better mounted than their fellows,

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drawing still farther away from them. Soon these were opposite the tope of trees, and went galloping past it without a suspicion that the fugitives were hiding there. A minute later they had ridden beyond a slight elevation and were out of sight. And now some ten of the enemy approached in a more or less collected body.

“Ready?” asked Claude of his little party. “Then charge!”

With a shout the four horsemen threw themselves upon the pursuing cavalry, and ere the latter had recovered from their astonishment were in their midst. Swords and tulwars swished in the air, and the crack of a revolver constantly recurred. Keeping close together, and using their weapons with effect, Claude and his friends had killed or wounded five of the enemy in the space of a minute. Then they dashed at the remainder, but these turned about at once and fled for their lives, Claude and Reg discharging their revolvers at them, and bringing three to the ground.

“Quick and satisfactory work,” said the former. “Load again and retire to the tope for a minute. Now, what are those fellows going to do?”

By the time they were beneath the shadow of the tope once more the few horsemen who had escaped them had reached their friends, who at once halted and conversed with them. Then one or two rode forward, waving their swords and shouting as if to encourage their comrades. But it was evident that all had lost heart, for they did not budge; and the courage of the would-be leaders wavering, the whole party turned about and fled down the road at their topmost pace. There was no doubt, indeed, that the energetic and courageous action of Claude and his friends had had a salutary effect, and had rid

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them of the greater portion of their pursuers. But they had still to deal with those who had ridden on.

"With a little luck we shall take them by surprise, just as we did these," said Claude, "for the light is only sufficient to show our figures. As we follow them they will imagine we are their comrades and will not expect attack. Let us get ahead, and when the moment arrives, use your weapons as well as you have done just now. Are you all ready? Then away we go."

Emerging for the second time from the clump of trees, they trotted along the road till they had reached the summit of the slight rise in front. Then, looking along the broad white streak of beaten earth, they saw the six native horsemen returning. Evidently the shouts and the sounds of the fray had reached their ears, and now they were galloping back. When they caught sight of Claude and his friends they pulled in their horses to a trot, and shouted questions as they approached.

"Where are the fugitives?" cried the foremost one. "Do not tell us that you have already captured and slain the Rajah and his feringhee friends. If you have it will be a disappointment, for we shall have missed the fun. But the reward is to be divided. Remember that. We all share in the money which Indoo Khan will give."

"Yes. We share alike," cried another.

Claude made no answer, but, waiting till only some fifty yards separated the parties, he called to his friends.

"Charge! On them!" he shouted.

With a rush and a shout the little party dashed at the native sowars (horsemen), and, taking them completely by

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surprise, scattered them. Three of the enemy at once fell from their horses, their heads laid open by vigorous swordcuts, while the remainder escaped unhurt, but scared almost out of their lives. Setting spurs to their animals they galloped away, and before long were out of sight beyond the rise.

And now the adventurous four had time to turn to themselves and discover what casualties they had suffered.

"Any wounds?" asked Claude gaily.

"Not in my case," answered Reg.

"Nor mine," came from the Rajah.

"Your servant Ikand has but a scratch," chimed in the latter, stretching out a skinny left arm, from which blood poured.

"See here, my masters, the sowar who lies there slashed at me as I passed him, and cut me over the arm. He was a foolish man, for had he not touched me he could have ridden on. As it was, I wheeled about, as no doubt you saw, and that is the result."

He pointed to the body of a native cavalryman which lay upon the road, the head resting in a dark and ever-widening stain on the soil.

"Then there is little to trouble us," said Claude. "It seems to me that we have much to be thankful for, for our enemies are gone, and if we push on our safety is assured. Reg, just set to work and bandage my arm like a good fellow."

"Your arm! Why, I thought Ikand was the only man wounded. I suppose it is a swordcut."

"Not so bad as that, Reg. It's a bullet wound, for which I have to thank Indoo Khan, and which I shall not forget to return with interest when next I meet him."

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"And you have said nothing all this time!" exclaimed the Rajah in astonishment. "Truly you English are wonders. Had I received that bullet I should have fallen with pain. Let me hold the arm while you are bandaged."

Tearing a long strip from the snowy turban which was swathed about Ikand's head, Reg bound Claude's wound and that of the servant. Then the party prepared to ride on again, discussing, before doing so, the best course to take.

"Now, are we to steer clear of the villages or not?" asked Claude. "Secondly, are we to make for any particular town? Benares is nearest, and then comes Allahabad. Cawnpore is quite fifty miles farther up the River Ganges."

"I suppose it will have to depend upon the course of the mutiny," answered Reg after a thoughtful pause. "You see, if the rebels occupy all the roads between us and Benares, we shall have to make a wide detour. Then Allahabad is so close to the first town that trouble will surround it as well if there is mutiny at Benares. In that case our destination must be Cawnpore. Suppose we leave the matter for the moment and let circumstances decide. In the meanwhile we can strike for the river."

"It is good advice that Reg sahib gives," said the Rajah. "I would add to it that we keep away from all villages, however small. For food we must depend upon Ikand, who can come and go amongst the people without arousing suspicion."

Accordingly the little party set their faces towards the River Ganges, and pushed on at a slow but steady pace. Avoiding everyone, they hid in a belt of straggling trees as soon as day dawned, and did not take the road again till night-fall. Two days later they were within a march of Benares;

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but here the faithful Ikand discovered that the surrounding country was alive with mutineers, who would make it difficult to reach the town. Turning north, therefore, they made a wide detour until well beyond Allahabad. They then marched beside the Ganges, and were within some thirty miles of Cawnpore when news of the utmost importance reached them, and caused them to turn aside once more to risk their lives, this time in the hope of saving some of their own people.

CHAPTER VI

To the Rescue

THE news had been brought to them by Ikand, who had ridden in to obtain tidings of the mutiny and provisions for his masters.

"I have grave news for you, sahibs," he said on his return, leaping from his saddle and squatting in the native fashion before them.

"What is it, then?" asked Claude.

"Listen, and I will tell you, sahib. When I rode into the village I found the street filled with excited people who were crowding about a certain spot. I forced my way amongst the villagers until I came to the centre of the gathering, where I saw a sight that made the blood boil. Sahibs, countrymen and women of yours are there, and their lives will be taken before the sun is overhead."

"English men and women!" exclaimed Claude and Reg together. "Who are they?"

"That I cannot say, for I dared not question them," replied Ikand. "But this is what I saw. Close beside the malik's (head-man) house a big man lay stretched upon the ground with a strip of linen bound tightly about his thigh. He had evidently been wounded, for his clothes were stained with blood which had dried some hours before. Beside him, looking at their tormentors as though they would tear them to

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pieces, indeed, defying them to come nearer and molest the Sahib, were three white ladies, two of whom were young girls."

"A lady! Girls!" cried Reg.

"And a wounded Englishmen," added Claude hotly. "This is a serious matter. But go on, Ikand."

"There is little more to tell you," proceeded the native. "Behind the persons of whom I have spoken stood a broad-shouldered, fair Englishman, the muscles of whose arms and legs threatened to burst the seams of his white clothing. I have seldom lived in one of the British garrisons, but I recognized him as one who stands in the ranks, and who bears a musket instead of a sword. He was bound hand and foot with ropes, and even those he strained to the utmost, shaking the beams of the house to which he was lashed. And all the while he showered threats and curses upon the people standing by. So fierce, indeed, was his appearance that they almost fled, and instead of jeering at their helpless captives and tormenting them, stood about as if afraid."

"What next?" asked Claude eagerly. "How do you know that their lives are in danger—that they are to be killed before noon?"

"The malik himself told me," replied Ikand promptly. "It seems that the country seethes with mutiny from east to west, and Calcutta itself is threatened. The last of the Mogul race sits upon the throne in Delhi, and everywhere the white people have been slain and tortured. Every village is in arms and ready to fall upon fugitives who may pass, and, worst of all, sepoys are everywhere to direct them. There are three of them here, and, spurred on by them, the malik will slay the white prisoners who have fallen into his hands. This I know

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as the truth, for, finding that I, who am your faithful servant, lent a ready ear to tales of the mutiny and bloodshed, he begged me to stay and take part in the scene."

"Wretch! Murderers!" cried Claude, covering his face with his hands. "It is horrible to think that within a mile of us lie five helpless white people, who are to be butchered in a few hours."

"It is awful!" groaned Reg. "The land seems to be overrun with violence and bloodshed. Every man's hand is turned against those to whom the people fawned only a week ago. I can scarcely believe all the news, the tale of this wide-spreading mutiny is so strange and so terrible."

It was, indeed, a crushing blow. The bare fact that a mutiny was afoot was already known to them; but the news that it had spread through Bengal, through Oudh and the North-West Provinces, filled them with consternation. But there was no help for it. They must make the best of the position, and do their utmost to join the British troops and help to beat the rebellious sepoys and restore the power of the English Raj. And meanwhile, what of the unhappy English people who lay prisoners in the village close at hand? Could they leave them to be killed in cold blood? What could they do to help them? Claude and Reg asked themselves these questions time and again, and failed to find a solution.

"Women and children too!" groaned Claude. "Can we not rescue them?"

Reg shook his head disconsolately.

"And face some hundreds of frantic natives?" he said. "It would be throwing away our lives for nothing. Don't think I want to back out of danger, Claude, but we must look at the

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matter seriously. What hope would there be for us with a whole village against us?"

"None," answered Claude despondently. "And yet—well, it goes against the grain to forsake them. Bother it all, old chap, we can't do it! I'd rather be shot like a dog than leave those poor souls in the lurch and ride for safety myself. I could never look my friends in the face again."

All this time the Rajah and Ikand sat listening and taking in the words, for both were thorough masters of the English language. Now, however, the former started forward, and, placing a hand upon a shoulder of each of his friends, spoke to them in earnest tones.

"You are right," he said solemnly. "I have watched you while you talked, and I have seen the struggle upon your faces. You cannot go on towards safety and leave those unhappy people. A lady and young girls are there, and how can an Englishman fly and leave them in danger? It is out of the question. Do, therefore, as your hearts dictate. If there is any way in which I can help you, show it me, and I will do all that lies in my power. Do you but lead, and I will follow."

"And I too," cried Ikand. "The sahibs can rely upon their servant. Once before, but a very short while ago, he feared to trust himself to their guidance, lest their rashness should destroy him and themselves. But he has seen them escape from Rowpoor, from greater danger, surely, than ever threatened man before, and therefore he will follow them blindly in this matter, knowing them to have both courage and discretion."

The lanky barber sank once more into his squatting position, and gazed about him in the most unconcerned manner possible,

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as if, indeed, the future plans of his masters had no interest for him. He had said his say, and was now merely waiting for the next event. If it meant an attack upon the village in which he would be killed, well—could he prevent it? Would it matter greatly to him? Surely not, for it was fate, and with that satisfying thought he squatted upon his heels and basked in the morning sun, determined to be happy while he could, for, like a true son of the Orient, he believed in leaving the future to take care of itself. As for Claude and Reg, they stood for some minutes thinking the matter over, too absorbed in possible plans to thank the Rajah and Ikand. At last Claude turned to his brother.

“Well,” he cried, in tones that were almost cross, so much had the news disturbed him, “how is it to be done? It’s settled, I suppose, that we go for that malik and the others, and try to rescue the prisoners?”

“Yes, we’re bound to,” answered Reg, lifting his hat and passing his fingers through his hair as if that would help him to master the difficulty. “But how to tackle the job beats me. We’re going to do it if it can be done, and that’s as far as I have got with the question.”

“It shall not beat us,” said Claude. “I have an idea that may help us.”

“What is it? Out with it, then, and be quick about it, for those poor things may be murdered at any moment.”

Claude did not answer his brother, but, turning to Ikand, he beckoned to him.

“Tell me,” he said, “were the three men of whom you spoke sepoy of the Bengal army?”

“Not sepoy, sahib. They were men of the cavalry. Sowars,

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as we call them. There were five when they reached the village, but the Englishman who is tied to the malik's house crushed the life from one by dashing him from his saddle and falling upon him, while the sahib who is wounded killed the second with his sword."

"And the horses?" asked Claude. "What has become of them?"

"That I cannot say. Perhaps they are tethered outside the village, but in any case they are near at hand, for the malik told me that the sowars had ridden in, and one, as I said, sahib, was killed by being thrown from his saddle."

"I must know for certain, Ikand," said Claude, "for without horses it will be madness to attempt a rescue. Now, listen to my plan. We three will enter the nullah which runs close at hand, and which I see leads to the edge of the village. It is deep and dry, and will easily hide us from the sight of any who may happen to look in that direction. We must hope that no one will meet us and give the alarm; but I do not fear such a thing, for the attention of the villagers is fully occupied.

"While we are in the nullah, you, Ikand, will go amongst the houses again, and return to us, reporting the position of the horses. When that is done, we must collect them near the malik's house, and then carry off the prisoners."

"But how? How on earth can we hope to be successful?" cried Reg, fearing for the moment that for some reason Claude had failed to grasp the impossibility of such a task. "Why, man alive, we should be knocked down and torn to pieces by the populace."

"Quite so. We should if we did not take proper pre-

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cautions," Claude answered with calm assurance. "I have a little plot running in my head which may help us. Tell me, Ikand, where are those sowars of whom you spoke? Are they amongst the people?"

"Not so, sahib. When I left they were in the house of the malik, recounting their actions since the mutiny commenced. No doubt they are there at this moment, and will be until the time arrives to kill the prisoners. Then, indeed, they will bestir themselves, for they are cruel at heart. I shudder even now when I think of the tales they poured into my ear, whether I would or not. Yes, they are tigers; they are mad for blood."

"Then they shall be treated as wild beasts," answered Claude quietly. "But first, before detailing my plan, I will ask you all what your feelings are as regards these men. Is it against your conscience, knowing that their hands are already stained with the blood of English people, to slay them when you set eyes upon them? I mean, would you think that murder, and prefer to take them prisoners?"

"No. I think not," Reg answered promptly. "By their own words to Ikand they are murderers. If I see them I shall feel that I am helping justice by shooting them upon the spot. They are brutes who deserve no mercy."

"And I agree with Reg sahib," the Rajah said. "With us life is of small account. I mean that the taking of one is no great matter. In this case, where our own safety and that of the prisoners depends on our action, I say slay them."

"I am the servant of the sahibs and of his highness," the faithful Ikand said simply, rising and salaaming to them.

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"What they wish is a command to me. I do not understand this conscience of which you speak."

"Then the sowars shall be killed," said Claude shortly. "And now I will tell you why. It is clear that this village has been aroused to fury by the mutineers who are now their leaders. If we rode to the village and attempted a rescue the sowars would encourage the people to attack us, and then our case would be hopeless. We should be surrounded, and both we and those whom we wish to rescue would quickly be overcome and murdered. We will therefore creep up to the malik's house, and while Ikand carries out another part of the plan, we three will rush in upon the sowars and slay them. Then we will turn upon the villagers. They are only an ill-armed crew, and, deprived of their malik and of the mutineers, will probably fall back. If not, we will attack them, and see what we can do. I confess that the plan is a bold one, and offers only a poor hope of success; but in these times of peril, when the few are matched against the many, we must take the risks, and trust that the very boldness of our action will bring us victory.

"And now for the other part of which I spoke. While we rush in and fall upon the malik and his sowar friends, Ikand will pass amongst the houses and fire them. You can see for yourselves that they are crowded together and will take fire from one another. The commotion this will cause should help to distract the attention of the villagers, and, taking advantage of the confusion, we will carry off the prisoners.

"There is my plan in full. If it is too hazardous for you, Prince, or for you, Ikand, say so honestly, and ride on for Cawnpore. Reg and I will then see what we can do unaided."

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“Claude sahib, you do not understand me,” cried the Rajah, springing to his feet and facing his two English friends with flashing eyes. “Did I not say that I would follow like a soldier, even as Ikand will do your bidding as a servant? Have you forgotten that my life is yours? That after you came to the palace and rescued me I swore to stand by you in whatever danger befell you? Then do not ask me, sahib, to ride on and leave you, for I am yours till peace is restored or my life is taken from me.”

It was evident that he was much upset—indignant even—at Claude’s words. But the question had served its purpose, for it had proved that full faith was to be placed in the Rajah and Ikand.

“I am sorry that I hurt your feelings,” said Claude, extending his hand. “Now let us tackle this business. Come along. We three will get into the nullah, while Ikand goes in search of the horses, and drives them behind the malik’s house. After that we will dismount, and, leaving our animals in the nullah, will carry out the rest of the plan.”

Tightening girths, and carefully seeing to their weapons, Claude, Reg, and the Rajah rode towards the nullah, or dry water-course, and, discovering a spot where the steep bank had fallen in, descended to the bottom. There, in single file, for the walls of sun-dried earth were only some six feet apart, they turned towards the village, and did not halt till they judged that they were close beside it.

“One minute, while I take a look round,” said Claude. “It will not do to make a mistake, and our object is to get as near as possible to the spot.”

Leaping from his saddle he dropped the reins on the neck

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of his horse and scrambled up the steep bank. A belt of coarse grass grew along the edge. Selecting a large tuft he thrust his head into the middle of it, and, screened from all prying eyes, he closely inspected the village.

"We've hit the spot off to an inch," he said, lowering himself a minute or two later, "for the malik's house is within twenty yards of us. There, listen to that. Those worthies are enjoying themselves."

All stood still, listening for sounds, and presently the dull note of a tom-tom was heard, accompanied by loud shouting of many voices.

"They are telling of what they have done," said the Rajah. "The words are indistinct from here, but we may be sure that is how they are amusing themselves."

"Then all the better for us," cried Reg. "The drums will drown any sounds we may make."

"I've more to tell you," said Claude, interrupting him. "As I looked out I saw six cavalry horses picketed close at hand, and Ikand was amongst them, bringing them still closer. All is working beautifully so far, and I begin to think we shall be successful."

Leaving his brother and the Rajah conversing in low whispers, Claude once more climbed to his look-out position, and remained there for fully ten minutes, when Ikand suddenly put in an appearance, having dropped into the nullah some distance away. His usually impassive countenance wore an excited grin, which caused his lips to separate, showing a double row of pearly teeth.

"Sahib, all is done as you commanded," he said. "The horses are at hand, and I am prepared to fire the houses as you said."

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"What about the villagers?" asked Claude. "Where are they? What is the meaning of all that shouting and beating of tom-toms?"

"The people are rousing themselves into fury, sahib. They are telling one another that they have suffered much from their English masters, and are preparing now to enjoy vengeance in full. The sowars and the malik are to join them shortly."

"Then we must act at once," said Claude promptly. "Dismount, all of you. Now, Ikand, off you go. I will watch you from here, and when you are ready to apply the match, lift your hand and wave. We will wait for the flame to catch the roof, and then, before the shouts of the people can reach the ears of the malik and his friends, we will be upon them."

"I will go, sahib," the native answered. "When the village is in flames from end to end, and you have punished those of my race who are traitors, you will find me close at hand with the horses, ready to act at your bidding. Farewell, sahibs! Farewell, your highness! If Ikand does not rejoin you, it will be because fate has overtaken him."

He salaamed till his turban almost touched the dried bed of the nullah, and, turning away without another glance at his companions, retraced his steps along the water-course. Soon Claude, who had again climbed into the long grass which lined the edge, saw the faithful fellow sauntering across the open. He held his breath with anxiety, and watched with beating heart. Arrived at the nearest house, Ikand paused for one moment to gaze into the wide street which cut its way through the heart of the village. Then, turning, he went to the thatch

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and stretched his hands towards it. Almost instantly a puff of blue smoke rose into the sultry air, and then, creeping by inches upwards, and almost invisible, so great was the glare of the morning sun, an ever-widening streak of flame burst from the roof. At last a gust of wind caught it, and in a moment the whole roof was enveloped in flame and smoke. The fire quickly spread to the adjoining native hovel, and before long was licking up that side of the village with a swiftness that was truly marvellous.

As soon as the match had been applied, Claude and his two comrades sprang from the nullah, and went racing across the open towards the malik's house. The door was shut when they reached it, but, bursting it open with a savage kick which tore it from its hinges of raw hide, Claude rushed in headlong, to find himself next instant in the centre of a ring, about which stood the malik and the three mutineers.

Swish! Down came his sword upon the head of one of them. Swish! swish! The Rajah and Reg aided him with their blows, and though the agile sowars were on their feet when the three rushed in upon them, and offered a fierce resistance, fighting like cats, barely two minutes passed before they and the malik lay huddled upon the floor, having paid with their lives for their treachery.

"Now," said Claude, when the first part of their scheme was accomplished, "let us release the prisoners, and then rush upon the villagers."

They dashed out, and the first object that attracted their attention was the figure of a burly Englishman, clad in a tattered suit of white uniform, and bound hard and fast to the uprights which supported the roof.



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"Cut him loose," said Claude; and, stepping forward at once, Reg slashed at the lashings with his sword, the frantic wrenches of the prisoner completing the work.

"Wait till I'm free," he cried, straining at his half-severed bonds, and scarcely showing a trace of astonishment at the appearance of his rescuers. "Just cut 'em right through, mate, and let me get hold of something like a weapon. Ha! me arms are as stiff as rods; but they'll work in time, and then—"

When he was free, he stamped his feet to start the circulation in his legs, for his bonds had been cruelly applied, and had actually cut into the flesh. Then he swung his arms in the air, bringing them thumping across his chest, as a shivering cabman loves to do on a cold day in Old England.

"Now, where's something to fight with?" he asked eagerly. "Ain't there a sword hereabouts?"

"Yes, in there, my man," said Claude, pointing to the malik's house. "Fetch it and come with us. Those villagers may be upon us in a moment."

The soldier at once darted away in search of a weapon, while Claude, Reg, and the Rajah ran to the other prisoners.

"What has happened?" asked the lady who occupied the centre of the group and was kneeling beside the wounded man. "The village in flames, and two English officers!"

She passed her hand wearily across her brow, as if the trials and dangers of the past few hours had been too much for her. At the words, however, the two girls, who were close at hand, sprang to their feet with cries of relief.

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"They have come to rescue us, Mother!" they said. "Look! They are preparing to attack the villagers."

That this was the intention of the little band was evident, for at Claude's order Reg, the Rajah, and the released soldier ranged themselves side by side. At that moment, too, Ikand came running up and joined them.

"We will drive those fellows away," said Claude, addressing the lady. "If you and your daughters will raise your companion and lead him behind the malik's house, you will find horses waiting there in readiness for flight. Now," he shouted, turning to his little band, "all together, let us go for those fellows."

Already the village was a scene of indescribable confusion. Billows of blinding smoke, which were heavily charged with fiery sparks, blew down the street, while the roar of flames, the crackle of blazing woodwork, and the crash of falling timbers filled the air. For the most part the villagers stood in the centre, looking on helplessly at the conflagration and at the escape of their prisoners. But some fifty of the men, recovering from their surprise and consternation, massed together, and, snatching the nearest weapons that came to hand, came rushing frantically at the tiny group opposed to them.

"Keep your fire till the last, Reg," shouted Claude. "Let us give it them with our swords."

"Right, sir! At them, all together!" cried the big soldier whom they had freed, waving a tulwar aloft. "We'll pay them out for their little game. Hurrah! Charge!"

Keeping close together, the little party met the oncoming villagers in the centre of the street, and flung themselves with

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unfaltering courage upon them. In a minute they were in their midst, hewing and cutting with all their strength. Then some gave way before the terrific blows of the soldier, who seemed to bear a charmed life. Hacking his way forward he used his right arm to wield the tulwar, while with his left he hit out wherever an opportunity offered. Indeed he struck terror into the hearts of the natives, for of a sudden they turned about and fled for their lives.

"That's paid some of them out," he shouted. "Stand, you cowards! Come back and give me another chance! Ah! you would, would you?"

He caught sight of one of the bolder spirits endeavouring to induce his comrades to return, and at once, leaving his comrades, dashed towards him. However, the man did not wait, but fled down the street at his topmost speed, and disappeared in the smoke of the burning houses.

"Now for escape!" cried Claude. "Let us get to the horses and ride away, for the villagers may collect in overwhelming force at any moment and surround us."

Retracing their way to the malik's house, the party of five ran up the street, and soon reached the spot where the horses were picketed.

"Let us look to the wounded man," said Claude. "Perhaps he cannot ride."

"If not, there's a cart here which might do," cried Reg. "Look, there it is behind that house, and I fancy it must have belonged to the prisoners."

"That's the case, sir," sang out the soldier, "and one of these horses drew it."

He ran towards one of the animals and led it aside.

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"Here he is, sir," he cried. "The harness is in the cart, for I saw one of those black varmint put it there. Shall I put him in the shafts? the master'll never be able to ride."

A hasty inspection of the wounded man, and a few questions to the lady and her daughters, confirmed this view, and at once some set to work to put the harness upon the horse and place him between the shafts of the cart.

Then willing hands lifted the injured gentleman tenderly in, the lady and her two daughters sprang upon the seat behind, while the rescued soldier took the reins.

"Now, collect the horses and let us mount," said Claude. "Ready all? Then away!"

Tearing the picket-ropes from their pegs, Claude and his three companions divided the spare horses amongst them, and, leaping into their own saddles, rode away after the cart, leaving the village in flames from end to end, and the inhabitants frantic with rage, and overwhelmed with the punishment which had so soon followed their treachery.

CHAPTER VII

The Makings of a Mutiny

NOT until they had placed ten miles between themselves and the flaming village did they come to a halt, and when they did, they dropped the reins upon their horses' necks and at once unbuckled the girths of their saddles so as to allow them to rest and regain their wind. As for the occupants of the cart, they sprang to the ground, and, tenderly lifting the wounded man, carried him into the shade of a giant tree and laid him on the grass.

"Can I do anything for you, ladies?" asked Claude, approaching the group and saluting. "We have had a long and a fast ride, and though all of us, and particularly our horses, need a rest, I fear it can only be a short one, for pursuit may be attempted."

"We are ready, sir, as soon as you give the word," answered the eldest. "Oh, I can scarcely believe that we are free, and out of the clutches of those monsters! It is too good, too happy a release! But let me tell you who we are. My unfortunate husband, who, I fear, is very seriously wounded, is the collector for this district. Time and again have we been upon the point of ordering our trap to take us and our children to Cawnpore, and would to God we had done so! But the natives seemed so faithful, and we could never believe that the mutiny would spread in this direction.

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“‘I will trust the sepoys till they prove that they are unworthy of it,’ said my husband, and with that he invariably put off the day of departure. See what it has brought us to! The news of a fearful outburst of rebellion reached us late last night, and we at once set out on our journey to Cawnpore. But someone must have been treacherous and sent information ahead, for when we arrived at the village where you found us, five Towars and a host of country people fell upon us. They beat us cruelly, and indeed I wonder that we were not instantly killed. Then, when all hope was gone, you and your tiny party arrived and saved us. Ah! it seems almost too good to be true. But I am forgetting. I did not tell you whom you have rescued. Our name is Heaton, and these are my daughters Maud and Julia.

“And now, who are you, pray?” she asked.

“We are Claude and Reg Watson, nephews of the dewan posted to the presidency of Rowpoor,” said Claude; “and this,” indicating the little Rajah, who joined them at the moment, “is his highness, Iektaboo Sing, chief of Rowpoor, but just now a fugitive from his State.”

“And, let me say, one who owes his safety, and indeed his rescue from the very jaws of death, to these two gallant Englishmen,” burst in the Rajah eagerly. “Ladies, let me tell you that your release is due entirely to them. They were the heart and soul of the attack, while I, with one named Ikand, who is their servant, merely lent my aid.”

“You have won laurels already then?” said Mrs. Heaton, eying the boys with evident pride. “Now let me finish my description of our party by telling you that the big soldier is Joseph Jenkins, or, shortly, Joe, as we usually call him. He

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is a faithful, honest fellow, who was sent to help my husband some four weeks ago. It was thought that his presence might quieten the country people, and induce them to pay their taxes more readily. Of course it was an unusual thing for the authorities to spare one of the soldiers, for Europeans are worth their weight in gold just now. However, there he is, and a more faithful, courageous man one could not wish to meet."

"I am sure of it," exclaimed Claude. "He is a lion in the fight; but for him I doubt whether we should have beaten those villagers. But now I think we ought to be moving. I shall not be happy until we are in Cawnpore."

Accordingly the party of fugitives tightened their girths again, those who were mounted changing their steeds, while a fresh horse was placed between the shafts of the cart. Then they set forward once more, trotting along the trunk road at a steady pace. Occasionally they passed through villages, but so resolute did the men appear that the country people let them go on their way without opposition. Indeed the sight of the burly, unkempt soldier who drove the trap was sufficient of itself to deter them, for he took no pains to conceal his feelings.

"They're just a lot of blessed murderers," he growled, "and as I'm sure they'd try their little games if we weren't ready, why, I'll just let 'em see that Joe Jenkins ain't inclined to put up with any nonsense. Let 'em look at that. It'll cool 'em perhaps."

He drew his tulwar from its sheath and drove through the street with the naked blade over his shoulder.

When twenty miles had been covered a halt of two hours

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was made. Then they pushed on again, and reached the outskirts of Cawnpore ere the sun was down. And now occurred the most dangerous part of their long journey. The sepoy and people of Cawnpore were not yet in open mutiny. But they were fully ripe for it, and were decidedly insubordinate. In fact it wanted only some small incident to make them burst into rebellion. Instead, then, of racing frantically up and down the street, beating their tom-toms and waving their rifles, they sat or lounged about the doors and hovels, scowling as the feringhees passed.

"They look a wicked lot," said Claude to his brother. "I firmly believe that if there were fewer men with our party, or we were unarmed, they would attack us."

"I agree with you," Reg answered. "They are just longing to be up and murdering. You can see it in their faces. Did you ever know natives of this country sit and scowl like that when an English party passed? They have forgotten their salaams, and think only of rebellion."

Stories innumerable had poured into Cawnpore, laden with the grim incidents of mutiny, a mutiny which had spread broadcast across Bengal, Oudh, and the North-West Provinces. Here and there rebellion had smouldered for days till it seemed to be out, and then, when the English had hoped that it was gone for ever, it had suddenly burst into life and annihilated them. That had been its condition at Cawnpore. For many weeks the sepoy had allowed thoughts of injustice and of mutiny to simmer in their hearts. But now their patience was nearly done, and if one of those who sat scowling in the doorways had but thrown himself upon Claude and his companions, and had called upon his comrades

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to help him, the movement would no doubt have been the signal for a general rising. No leader, however, came forward. As yet they lacked the necessary courage, and it was partly to that fact, and in no small degree to the undaunted bearing of the Englishmen, that the cavalcade owed its safety.

"We'll just ride along and take no notice of them," said Claude. "If they get in our way, try to avoid them, and if that is impossible, charge them to one side. If it comes to a *mêlée* we will fall back behind the trap, where the Rajah and Ikand are stationed."

"There's something that looks like a barrack!" cried Reg a moment later. "If it is we shall find British troops there."

"You're right, sir," answered Joe Jenkins, standing in the trap and waving his tulwar in his excitement. "Don't I know them barracks jist! Here, pull up, and turn through the archway. Now, to the right, and we're in front of the officers' quarters."

The cavalcade followed his directions, and, turning beneath an arch, came to an abrupt halt, their farther progress barred by a barrier of timber.

"Who goes there? Halt!" cried a gruff voice, and then, as the sentry on duty noticed the ladies who were with the party, he called loudly to someone who was out of sight. "Hi, sir," he shouted, "more fugitives, and ladies too!"

A minute later a dapper young officer appeared, and at once saluted.

"Who are you?" he cried. "Welcome to our poor defences. We are indeed glad to see you arrive safely, for we know that many Europeans have perished at the hands

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of the country-people. Here, some of you men move aside the barricade."

At the order some half-dozen soldiers approached, and, setting to work with a will, removed a portion of the timber and allowed the fugitives to enter, after which the barrier was at once replaced.

"Now I will introduce the party," said Claude, dismounting beside the officer. "These in the trap are Mr. and Mrs. Heaton and their two daughters. The soldier is known as Joe Jenkins. We others are his highness the Rajah of Row-poor, Reg Watson and myself attached to his court, and our servant, Ikand. Can you tell us what to do with a wounded man? I am sorry to say that Mr. Heaton is badly hurt, while I have a graze which would be improved by surgical attention."

"My dear fellow, of course I can," answered the officer, who had again saluted the ladies when presented. "By the way, I'm Tomkins, lieutenant of native infantry. Now come along with me, and drive that cart carefully, Jenkins, for the place is cut up with trenches."

"Trenches!" exclaimed Claude in astonishment. "Are not all the barracks occupied?"

"Not for the past week," was the answer. "Things have begun to look so threatening that the majority of us came here a night or two ago. Some of the civilians have been here longer, and I believe all the women and children are to occupy this barrack to-night. We've been expecting an outbreak of mutiny, and we've done our best to prepare for it. You can see the wall we have thrown up, and those brick houses are stored with food and ammunition. We have worked like slaves, especially at the digging, for the ground

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in this hot weather is as hard as iron. But come along. This is the way to the doctor's quarters."

Half an hour later Claude and his friends had settled down.

"That's better!" Claude exclaimed as he rejoined Reg after having his arm bandaged. "The arm was beginning to throb painfully, though I did not notice it much when on the road. I suppose the excitement of getting through those fellows occupied all my thoughts. Let us go out and look round while the doctor examines poor Mr. Heaton. I fancy he is very badly wounded, for when he was lifted from the cart and carried into the rough hospital they were obliged to leave his wound alone while they applied restoratives. It is a hard time for Mrs. Heaton and her daughters."

The two lads strolled into the centre of a confined space about which a wall of earth was thrown up. It was barely four feet in height, and could be expected to afford but little shelter. Here and there apertures had been left, and through them grinned the muzzles of cannon, some of small calibre, while others were of respectable size. Alongside the mountings a supply of shot was piled, in readiness for the expected attack.

In the centre of the entrenched space was a well, while close beside the wall were two barracks, once the hospital for European troops. Round about stood bungalows and cantonment gardens, while farther afield, and dotted here and there about the plain upon which Cawnpore was built, were the native town and other collections of houses, amongst which were the huts in which the native troops were quartered.

"It seems an excellent place for defence," remarked Claude. "I mean that there is very little shelter round about for an

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enemy. But for a garrison the entrenchment is very small, and when women and children are added to the number we shall be closely packed. The doctor told me that there is a considerable store of provisions as well as of shot and powder. In fact, everything possible has been done to prepare for trouble. I wonder whether it will come."

"Certain to, I should think," answered Reg. "Just recollect the scowling faces we passed a short while ago. Remember the murderers from whom we escaped."

"Yes, I do, Reg. Much as I should like to think otherwise I cannot help feeling certain that Cawnpore will be overrun by mutineers before very long. Thank God we have been able to bring the Heaton's to a place of safety! It would have been terrible had we left them to die."

"It would, Claude. We should never have lifted our heads again. We should have had cause to be ashamed of ourselves. But I say, old chap, they're pretty girls, don't you think?"

Reg's features relaxed, and he smiled.

"You know we've had to be so serious these past two weeks," he went on, "that we've had no thoughts for anything but plans and stratagems. Honestly, don't you think them stunning girls?"

"Rather!" burst forth Claude. "Had they been old and ugly one would still have felt awfully pleased at the thought that they were saved, but it adds to the pleasure when they turn out to be young and pretty, and plucky into the bargain. But, I say, here comes the doctor. Let's ask after Mr. Heaton."

"Discussing our defences, eh?" remarked the doctor who had attended to Claude's arm, issuing from the hospital and

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joining the boys at that moment. "I can tell you that the thought that there is a fortified place for us Europeans to retreat to has lifted a load of care and anxiety from the hearts of the men. It's the women and the little ones we're concerned about, lads. If it were not for them we could put our heads and our shoulders together and thrash these skulking rascals. As it is we are tied to the spot. To attempt to push through to Lucknow would be suicidal, for the ladies and children would hamper our movements, while many would perish from fatigue and exposure to the heat. No; we have done well in settling to remain here, but we shall have to fight for it—fight for our lives and those of all we love. These walls of earth will soon be surrounded by thousands of mutineers, thirsting for our blood. I am certain of this, for after more than twenty years in the country I have learned to know the native and his moods."

"But you will beat them off," cried Claude.

"Yes, I hope so. While food and ammunition last we shall keep them out. Our lives will depend upon the duration of the siege and the time it takes for relief to reach us."

"Then troops are expected, Doctor?" asked Reg.

"Well, scarcely expected," was the answer. "At the present moment none could be spared. But later they will come, and let us hope that they will not long delay their arrival. Don't think me a croaker, you youngsters, but I tell you the land seethes with mutiny, and it will take an army to march through to our relief."

"Then you think the mutiny will spread?" asked Claude. "We scarcely know what has occurred, and have only a vague idea as to the cause of trouble. We've heard that the issue of

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cartridges has been the main reason. But surely there is something more."

"Certainly there is," replied the doctor with emphasis. "Let us go over yonder and sit down comfortably. I've a spare half-hour on my hands, which is not often the case, and, if you care, I'll devote it to telling you what I know about this mutiny. We have a pretty good idea of what has happened, as the telegraph wire has talked to us from every part; for future events I can only bring a life-long knowledge of the country to bear in forecasting what will happen. Here we are. Now squat on that broken gun-mounting while I light a cheroot. It's a bad habit, lads, and an expensive one, but the weed has a soothing effect which is not to be despised in these days of worry and anxiety."

The doctor seated himself upon the top of the gun-mounting, and lit a cheroot with practised hand. Then he lifted his topee from his head, and ran his fingers through locks of hair which showed many a trace of white. He was a fine, handsome man, in the very prime of life. Long residence in the hot plains of India had, no doubt, brought the gray hairs to his head, but otherwise he showed every sign of activity and good health, and, moreover, bore upon his clear-cut face a kindly look which had won him many a friend. Claude and Reg had taken to him on the instant, and, obedient to his nod, they sat down and waited for the promised yarn.

About the three there was a square patch of deep shadow, for twilight was now almost gone, and night, which follows the disappearance of the sun so rapidly in the East, was already falling.

"The moon comes up early," said the doctor. "Let us chat

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till it appears. Then we'll be able to see one another, and so converse all the easier."

Accordingly they sat there in the gathering gloom, Claude and Reg watching the features of their companion till they became blurred and indistinct, and then fixing their eyes upon the dull red end of the cheroot, which grew brighter as the minutes passed, till it blazed like a star in the darkness. At last up came the moon, and in a moment barrack and entrenchment, the grinning guns and the motionless sentries, the wide sweeping plain with its cantonment gardens and its bungalows, and the trio seated upon the gun-mounting were brought into bold relief by the silvery, ghost-like beams.

"How delicious the cool breeze is after the hot day we have had," said the doctor, "and how peaceful that glorious moon looks! Would to God that the future were as calm and bright! But come; I must set to work and give you my story. Here goes.

"It is just possible, my lads, that though you have lived in India for the past year, and spent your childhood in the country, you are still ignorant of the forces which govern this vast possession of ours, and therefore I will begin by outlining the history of this huge continent from the first coming of the English. You must know that years ago—I don't know how many, but a long time since—straggling traders of our blood came to the eastern shores of India, and, finding that a rich living was to be made, settled there in large numbers. They formed the nucleus of a company which has increased in power from that date to this, and is known as the East India Company, or 'John' Company. Now, the members and agents of this company were not

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the first white people in the field, for the Portuguese and the Dutch had been before them, and had reaped a rich harvest. By degrees, however, their numbers and their power declined, till the English were the chief amongst the settlers. Then a fourth power appeared in the form of emissaries from France. For years the men of that race and our own lived in peace with one another, and with their neighbours. Never once up to this time had there been trouble between natives and Europeans. It paid the inhabitants of India to grant concessions, and it improved the trade of the settlers to be on the best of terms with the natives.

“A time came, however, when all this was changed. A certain Frenchman who had ingratiated himself with the ruler of a neighbouring state obtained permission to raise and train a force of sepoys, and to erect forts. A little later, in 1746 to be precise, this Frenchman took advantage of a condition of war between France and England to attack Madras, which was the English settlement, and which lies some way to the north of Pondicherri, the centre of French power in India.

“Our countrymen were defeated, for they had no troops to fall back upon, and so Madras fell into the hands of the French. But then a quarrel arose between the victors and the local nabob as to who was to retain possession, and in the end, after desperate fighting, the French triumphed, thus for the first time coming into conflict with the natives. Small as this incident may seem, it was full of promise for the English, for, seeing that conquests might be made, they too set to work to raise and arm sepoy regiments. It was not done in a day, nor in a year. It took long to prepare an efficient force. Once ready, however, and commanded by the gallant Clive,

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whose fame will live for ever, this native army, with a sprinkling of European troops, did wonders for the great company. With their aid Bengal was conquered, and, later, Oudh and the delta of the Ganges. Then followed the conquest of the North-West Provinces, and after that the Punjaub.

“That is a very brief outline of how we conquered India. I will now tell you, before describing the events of the past few weeks, why it is that we have quarrelled with our native troops.

“You have heard, of course, that the greased cartridge is one of the causes of disaffection, but far from being the chief, it is but the most insignificant in reality. There have been many other factors at work for years, undermining the discipline of the sepoy, and this tale of the cartridges has been cunningly devised by conspirators to inflame the minds of men who are already indignant with their masters. It is really the puff of wind which has caught the smouldering spark of hate and distrust, and has fanned it into the fury of rebellion. How that feeling of anger was produced is not easy to understand when one looks at the surface of things, for it has arisen very gradually. But to men like myself, who have lived for many years in the country, and especially in the northern parts of India, the cause is very clear. Mismanagement and misgovernment have awakened the distrust of the natives. They have felt that their privileges are being tampered with, and worst of all, the sepoy of Bengal, of Oudh, and of the North-West Provinces have been encouraged to think so highly of themselves, such consideration has been shown them, that their arrogance has simply risen beyond all reasonable bounds.

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“Just take notice of this fact: the mutiny which has broken out about us is practically confined to the north of India, it is the sepoys of Bengal who have risen. Elsewhere the country is at peace, for the Bombay and southern troops have been ruled in a totally different manner. Wholesome consideration has been shown them, while discipline has been firmly maintained, with the result that they are loyal to the English.

“Years ago, in the days of gallant Clive and Warren Hastings, the sepoys of Bengal were trustworthy. But their loyalty has been destroyed in many ways. You must know that the natives of India are divided into numerous religious castes; the higher the caste the more important the individual. Now, this question of caste has been allowed to dominate the Bengal army, so much so that men of a low religious order are driven from the ranks by their betters. These latter, who practically occupy the position of gentlemen in England, have been excellent soldiers, so far as fighting is concerned, but when called upon to carry out the thousand-and-one other duties to which men in the ranks are liable, they have refused on the plea that it is derogatory to their “caste” to dig, to cook food, or even to ring the gong that stands at the guard-house. To such an extent has this been carried that scores of natives of low caste are kept to wait upon the sepoys. Then again, these men of high caste have clung together to such an extent that they have shielded evil-doers from amongst their numbers, and have thereby made it impossible to bring punishment to the guilty ones, so ruining all sense of discipline.

“One would think that such a condition of affairs was sufficiently bad, but another factor appeared, which rapidly

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undermined what little discipline was left. Whereas in the old days the commanding-officer of a native regiment was the personification of the 'Company', a great man to whom all looked, and beyond whom none cared to appeal, an order now made it possible for a native in the ranks to apply to the Government direct. Numbers took advantage of the order, and knowing that the colonel was no longer the powerful man they had thought him, they did not hesitate to commit numerous breaches of discipline, following up any punishment awarded by a secret appeal to head-quarters.

"Thus, you see, the sepoy's were pandered to, till independence of their colonel, and pride of caste, caused them to become inordinately conceited. They had an unlimited idea of their own importance and power, and were, indeed, in such a condition that the slightest injustice, whether imaginary or real, would force them into open mutiny.

"A real injustice was soon found. It happens that the greater number of the sepoy's who fill the ranks of the Bengal army are recruited from the province of Oudh, which occupies a large space in these northern parts. There was formerly a direct incentive for the men of Oudh to enlist over and above that offered by their army pay, each when he joined obtaining the right to petition directly to the British resident at Lucknow if any injustice were offered to himself or his relatives. You perhaps have heard that the law as administered by native judges is very crude, and knowing that, you can the better realize that this privilege of petition against the decision of local justices, who sat in village court-houses, was a real one, and highly valued by the men of Oudh. That being the case, you will readily understand their indignation and bitter disap-

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pointment when the right of petitioning the resident at Lucknow was swept away. An order suddenly appeared annexing Oudh, and at the same time replacing the native judges by Europeans.

“The loss of a valued privilege, and the sweeping manner in which the change had been brought about, roused the hatred of the sepoy. It was a rebuff to their pride and the growing ideas of their own power. Day by day they were learning that they possessed unusual importance and no small amount of strength, for they were encouraged to defy their officers. And now, quite unexpectedly, an attack was made upon their rights. You can easily understand that their fury almost strangled their discretion, and very nearly caused them to mutiny.

“Upon this sudden loss of power another blow swiftly followed, causing even greater exasperation, and to enable you to understand the facts of the case I must explain that, beyond a few special regiments, the major part of the army consists of sepoy who have agreed to serve in India alone. It so happened that men were wanted to quell the Burmese at this moment; and an order was issued for a certain regiment to embark at once, though that regiment had agreed for service in India alone. There is no doubt that the order should never have been issued, for it was a breach of agreement. But despite that fact it was persisted in, the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, insisting that the regiment should sail. It is not surprising, therefore, that men who had been taught to defy their officers should think nothing of defying a governor-general. The regiment selected for service in Burma refused to budge; commands, expostulations, and threats were

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in vain, and there was nothing for it but to cancel the order. Of itself this incident was a tremendous blow to discipline, for the tale spread like wildfire all over India, and proved to the sepoy that if only they held together they were powerful enough even to defy the British Raj. But what was worse, this breach of the Government's promise roused the hate of the natives. It engendered distrust in their hearts, and prepared the way for the conspirators' tale of the cartridges.

"This was the last of the causes. Looking at this vast country, with its many thousands of trained native troops and its insignificant English garrison, it is not surprising to hear that there are many men who long to drive the whites from the country, who dream of a return of native power. These men, doubtless more thoughtful and scheming than the average, have suddenly hit upon a plan to rouse the sepoy to rebellion. They have spread the tale broadcast that a new rifle and cartridge are about to be issued for one purpose alone, and that is, to rob the natives of their highly-cherished 'caste' and convert all to Christianity. These conspirators say that the fat of the hog or of the ox is used to grease the cartridge, and thereby account for two of the great classes into which Indians are divided, namely, Hindus and Muhammadans. The wrath of the former has been roused to fever-heat, for to use the fat of the ox offers a deadly insult, that animal being held as sacred by them. For the Muhammadans it was sufficient for the conspirators to whisper that the cartridge which they were ordered to bite was coated with the fat of hogs, that beast being hateful to all true members of the sect.

"Thus, you will see, a powerful instrument has been chosen,

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and it has done its work thoroughly. Those of the sepoys who were content with their lot have been roused to mutiny at what they believe to be an attempt to destroy their caste, while the ne'er-do-wells, the rebelliously-inclined, who have been brooding over their fancied wrongs, have needed but the suspicion of a new injustice and outrage on their dignity to lose all control of their temper, and rush headlong forth to slay till their British oppressors are exterminated and this land of India is theirs once more.

"There, you've had the tale up to the beginning of the mutiny. Allow me a few moments to regain my breath before telling you what bloodshed there has been."

The kindly doctor relit his cheroot, which had gone out, and, thrusting his hands into the side-pockets of his white linen coat, leaned back against the gun-mounting and stared at the moon, lost in the deepest thought.

CHAPTER VIII

Desperate Fighting at Cawnpore

SOME minutes elapsed ere the doctor took up his narrative, and while he paused the two lads sat silent, turning over in their minds all he had already told them. Now, for the first time, they grasped the true significance of the mutiny which had suddenly broken out. They realized that the actual cause was not the issue of greased cartridges, as they had heard, but that the anger and arrogance of the sepoy was the result of years of weak government and foolish pandering to caste, to which wrongs, fancied or real, were added. And now, when the native troops were ripe for rebellion, this tale of an attempt to wreck their religious faiths had been the last straw.

“I hardly know where to begin this tale of terrible bloodshed,” said the doctor, suddenly flicking the ash from his cheroot and rising to his feet; “but as I have started my narrative of the causes from the very beginning, I fancy I had better tell you briefly what troops there are in India, so that you may the more readily grasp the real danger in which we stand.

“Well, when I tell you that our native troops have occupied garrisons, posts, and forts from the Eastern Provinces on the Irrawaddy right away to the mountains on the Indus, you will understand that their numbers must be great. Indeed, the

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Bengal army alone, with which we are now particularly concerned, has a muster-roll of more than a hundred thousand, divided into numerous regiments, some of horse and the majority of foot, while a due proportion are gunners. As a rule these regiments are fully officered by Englishmen; a few, however, have only three or four Europeans, and these are called irregular regiments.

“Added to the Bengal army are various *corps d’armée* which are known as contingents, and are supplied by the native rulers of Gwalior, Bhopal, and others, amongst them, of course, being Rowpoor, from which you are fugitives. And here I will remark that it seems that your case is an exception, for the majority of these contingents are very loyal. Their discipline and drill are excellent, and they have usually a full complement of British officers. Yours, you have told me, had only three, comprising your uncle and your two selves.

“However, when you compare the large numbers of native troops in the country with the British soldiers, and think that a huge mutiny is afoot, you will be startled at the gravity of the situation. Look east and west, or north and south, and you will find that numerous important stations have not a single European soldier. Native troops alone are quartered there. This is the case at Delhi, the old capital, at Allahabad, where there is a large magazine, and at numerous other centres. Lucknow, which is in the heart of Oudh, possesses the only European regiment in the whole of that large province. And so it is elsewhere, for our numbers barely reach 15,000 in this northern part of India. Five thousand more are now in Persia, fighting the Shah, under the command of Outram and Havelock.

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"Now for the mutiny itself. We here, in Cawnpore, have had the news flashed to us by the telegraph wire, and have fortunately been wise enough to prepare for trouble. The first message came from Berhampore in February last, and told us that incendiaries had been at work, and that the sepoys had refused the new cartridges. But the matter settled down, and all was peace again for a little while. Then there was trouble at Barrackpore, a sepoy named Mangul Pandey attacking an officer.

"There is little doubt that these were merely symptoms of coming mutiny, and that the sepoys were then not ready for revolt, for again discipline was restored, and but for conflagrations at Unballa and other stations, and more refusals to use the new cartridges, the native army remained in passive mutiny until last month brought with it the hottest weather. Indeed the heat has been terrific, and we have felt it greatly here, for the work of entrenching has been heavy. No doubt our comrades at Lucknow have suffered too, for Sir Henry Lawrence, their commissioner, has set them to work to prepare defences similar to this.

"And now I come to the outbreak of real mutiny. On Sunday afternoon, May 11, the sepoys at Meerut rushed to their arms, and, firing the Government buildings, scattered to attack the European bungalows."

"At Meerut!" exclaimed Claude, interrupting the narrative. "I stayed there some months ago. Surely the sepoys could not have done much mischief, for British troops were at the station?"

"Alas! that did not prevent them," answered the doctor bitterly. "There was some terrible error, for our good fellows

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were ordered to hold their lines. I need not tell you that they were furious, and almost mutinous themselves. For two hours they remained in their lines, fuming and fretting, and all the while murder and torture of helpless women and children was taking place. Then the sepoy bands banded together and marched to Delhi, which is forty-five miles distant.

"They were allowed to proceed unmolested! Yes, impossible though it may seem, the same fatal order kept our troops from pursuing, and with what result? Those murderous natives came upon the city of Delhi unsuspected. They were joined by the native regiments there, and they at once fell upon all Europeans who could be found, and slew them. Sometimes, too, they tortured them, I fear."

"Horrible! What monsters!" exclaimed Reg, aghast at the news.

"It is dreadful," answered the doctor, "and the only consolation we have is the knowledge that our countrymen faced the odds right gallantly, and died like English gentlemen. Indeed there were heroes among them, for we have since heard that the telegraph operator stuck to his post till he was cut to pieces, and managed to send a warning elsewhere. 'The sepoy bands have come in from Meerut,' he telegraphed; 'Mr. Todd is dead, and, we hear, several Europeans. We must shut up.' That last sentence is easily translated. It means that that brave fellow and his helpers died at their posts.

"There were other heroes in Delhi that day. Nine officers and men guarded a magazine within the walls, close to the palace. They defended it against hordes of the enemy, and then, finding further resistance hopeless, deliberately fired the

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powder! Think of that. They blew up the very magazine in which they were posted, and those who were able fled for their lives. Is that not a gallant deed? Four only of the nine survived, and we now know all the details. I will not narrate them, but will tell you that the order to apply the match to the train was given by signal agreed upon before, and that consisted in one of the defenders lifting his hat. It was given as coolly as if the officer were saluting a friend, and in an instant a mighty explosion shook the whole of Delhi, stunned the surviving defenders, and hurled hundreds of the attacking sepoys out of existence.

“And now let us turn to other places and follow that important message which was telegraphed from Delhi. It was read at Unballa, at Lahore, and at a score of garrisons. It was flashed east and west, and north and south, and in the majority of cases it acted as a warning. Wherever there happened to be European troops the disaffected sepoys were at once surrounded and disarmed ere they could break into mutiny, while elsewhere they are held firmly in check by their officers. Around Cawnpore, Delhi, Lucknow, and other towns the rebellion rages, and we who are stationed here must fight it alone for a time, for our comrades elsewhere have enough to do to secure their own safety. Soon, however, they will organize an expedition, and then we may look for relief. There, my lads, you know as much about this rebellion as I do.”

“But what of Cawnpore?” asked Claude, “You have not told us what number of sepoys are expected to attack.”

“No, I omitted to do so as it is impossible to be certain,” replied the doctor. “But this I can say. General Wheeler is our commander, and had he possessed the troops he too

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would have disarmed the sepoys. But we muster only four hundred and fifty in all, and should be cut to pieces if we attacked the native regiments. Nor are they alone, for the riffraff of the city have joined them, besides numerous sowars and troops from elsewhere. Then the Nana sahib, the lord of Bithoor, has come in with a numerous following. Outwardly he pretends friendship for us, but now it is no longer possible to doubt his real intentions. He is hand-in-glove with the mutineers, and unless I am much mistaken will lead them when they attack."

"And when will that be?" said Reg anxiously.

"Perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow. There is no telling. We expect them to break into mutiny at any moment, and are fully prepared. When they come they shall learn what it is to be treacherous. But come, let us take a turn up and down before I leave you."

Leaping from the disused gun-mounting the two lads followed the doctor into the open, and strolled beside the entrenchments with him. Then they parted with him, thanking him for his kindness, and returned to that part of the barrack in which they had left Ikand and the Rajah.

"What's to become of us?" asked Claude as they walked along. "We seem to be the only two who have no particular work in hand, and no soldiers to lead."

"Then I vote we go to the general," said Reg. "You see we cannot leave Cawnpore, for there is no doubt that to do so would be to fall into the hands of the mutineers. So, as we are to remain here, we may as well help in the defence. I'll tell you what to do. Go to General Wheeler, and offer the services of all four. If Joe will come also all the better."

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"It's a good idea, and we'll go at once," answered Claude promptly. "But first let us tell the others."

Five minutes later both lads stood before the veteran who commanded Cawnpore.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked, eyeing them critically. "Your faces are strange to me. You cannot be officers of mine."

"No, sir," answered Claude. "We are nephews of Major Watson, who was dewan at Rowpoor."

"Ah! I have heard," said the general suddenly. "You rode in here a few hours ago with some ladies. Is that not the case?"

"Yes, sir, and we brought the Rajah too."

"Then you have behaved gallantly, Mr. Watson. But I will commend your conduct on a later occasion. Tell me, can I do anything for you now? Be concise and quick, please, for my time is fully occupied."

"We have come to report ourselves, sir, and to ask for a place in the defence. Our party will consist of five in all."

"You will be most welcome," cried the general heartily. "My second in command will see to you, and later I myself will visit you at your post. There is the officer I mentioned. Go to him at once and get to your stations; I fear that the mutineers are about to attack us."

He pointed to someone who was approaching in the darkness, and retired. Ten minutes later Claude and his friends had taken their stations close to one of the guns, and just behind the low wall of earth which had been thrown up as a barrier. Rifles and an ample store of ammunition had been

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given them, and, having loaded, they lay down upon the ground to wait for an attack. On either hand men were grouped along the edge of the earth walls, or reclined behind the guns. Some were English soldiers, while quite a large sprinkling were civilians, merchants, telegraphists, railway-men, and others employed by the Government. Grim and determined they looked upon that cool moonlit evening, and no doubt many of them allowed their thoughts to wander across the sea to Old England. Many, too, wondered how they and their dear ones would fare, for these were men who had come in with their wives and children to escape the mutineers.

"Hish! Ain't that a yelling over there?" suddenly asked Joe Jenkins, springing to his feet to look over the wall. "Look at that! Those brutes have started a fire."

As he spoke a sheet of flame was seen to leap into the air away in the distance. A bungalow was on fire.

"It belongs to our riding-master," called out one of the men. "That means the beginning of trouble. There, listen to that!"

Indeed the conflagration seemed to be the signal for the commencement of mutiny, for scarcely was the flash of flames seen when shrieks and fiendish cries resounded through the air, turning the native lines of Cawnpore into a pandemonium. The defenders of the entrenchment, together with the women and children there, listened to it, and turned pale at the noise, for it boded evil to them. Then the faces of the men brightened, and, grasping rifles or sponging-rods the tighter, they peered over the breastwork, determined to sell their lives dearly should the sepoy attack.

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A few minutes later some of the officers of the native infantry rode in and reported that the mutineers had fraternized with the troops belonging to the Nana sahib, and were looting the treasury.

"Pass the word along for all to lie down at their stations save a few sentries," the general now ordered. "Those fiends will have plenty to occupy their attention till morning. That is when we may expect trouble."

Accordingly all sat down, and waited with weapons close at hand. But sleep was out of the question, for Cawnpore was filled with a crew of frantic, shouting people. No sooner had the sepoy's broken into rebellion than they sent parties to the prisons, and these, breaking open the doors, set loose a great number of desperate characters, who at once joined the mutineers in sacking and burning the bungalows.

"Did you ever hear such blood-curdling shrieks?" said Claude, as he and Reg sat listening. "Thank God! those murderers have missed their prey this time, and cannot slaughter helpless women and children as they did at Meerut. If I were surrounded by a band of those fellows and saw no chance of beating them and escaping, I would shoot myself rather than fall into their hands."

"And I too, Claude. The fact that death stares us all in the face will make each one of us fight till the bitter end. Let the rebels come, I say. After the story of blood and murder which the doctor gave us, I long to strike back at the brutes."

Reg's wish was not to be gratified that night; indeed not one of the mutineers came within sight. In the morning, however, two infantry regiments suddenly advanced against

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the entrenchment, and at once the defenders sprang to their feet.

Boom! went one of the nine guns, and the defenders watched eagerly for the result. A quarter of a minute later the shell burst just in front of the mutineers, at once causing some to scatter. The majority, however, pressed on.

"Stand aside, and let me lay the gun this time," cried one of the officers gaily. "We'll see whether we cannot pitch a shell right into them."

Betraying no sign of excitement, he carefully looked along the sights, and gave directions to alter the range. Then, as the sepoy began to cross the zone at which he had aimed, he fired the fuse and sprang back.

"Hit! hit!" roared four hundred voices a few moments later, while many of the defenders almost danced with excitement and pleasure combined. True to the hand which laid it, the gun had thrown a shell into the very midst of the advancing sepoy, and when the smoke blew to one side many dark dots were seen huddled upon the plain. An instant after another gun boomed, and at this the mutineers turned about and retired.

"That is first blood to us," said Claude joyfully. "Let us hope it will be a lesson to the sepoy, and will keep them from attacking. I wonder whether they will follow their comrades of Meerut and march to Delhi. The last of the Mogul rulers lives there, and it seems that all the natives are collecting to his banner. Here's the doctor. Let's ask him."

"Well," said the doctor, when they had put the question to him, "I honestly believe they will remain, in the hope of

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capturing and killing all of us. This Nana sahib is a schemer of unusual cleverness, and he will never allow the rebellious sepoy of Cawnpore to march to Delhi, for should they do so they would swell the power of the old, deposed Mogul ruler, and weaken his own. Dhoondoo Punt is ambitious, and far from wishing to see the Mogul on the throne again he hopes to attain to it himself. He will therefore detain the mutineers, and with them and his own rascally troops as a nucleus will endeavour to gather a mighty force about his banner. If they desire to do so he will have little difficulty in persuading them to remain, as he will remind them that they have not yet disposed of us."

The doctor's words proved true; instead of quitting Cawnpore, the mutineers at once set about its capture, and before very long had been reinforced by so many more that ten thousand at least surged round the entrenchment which hid the Europeans.

What a scene it was! Without, hosts of fierce natives firing frantic volleys, and serving ten guns and three mortars which commanded the entrenchment; and within little more than four hundred men, crouching in the trenches or manning the guns. In the centre stood two old hospital buildings of one story only, and in these were crammed more than three hundred unfortunate women and children. Close outside these buildings was a well, the only water-supply, and about it, day and night without cessation, swished a hail of bullets or huge cannon-balls. The boom of guns was almost incessant, and was followed too often by the shrieks of the victims.

Day after day the mutineers plied the entrenchments with shot, shell, and carcasses (a shell filled with combustible

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material), but never once, in spite of their overwhelming numbers, could the Nana sahib (Dhoondoo Punt) persuade them to rush to close quarters. Instead, manning some buildings which commanded the English defences, they poured in a continuous hail of shot, picking off anyone who showed himself.

"It is terrible for those poor women and children!" said Claude one day, while he and Reg lay under cover in the trenches listening to the boom of cannon. "The heat in those buildings is terrific, for even in the shade the glass stands at one hundred and thirty degrees, while inside, owing to the manner in which they are crowded, it is simply insufferable. I've promised to draw water for Mrs. Heaton this evening."

He added the last sentence quietly, as if the undertaking were not particularly dangerous. But Reg knew, and silently admired his brother. To creep to the centre of the entrenchment during the day and lower a pail into the well meant exposure to the muskets of scores of natives, while the first creak of the windlass at night drew a heavy fire in that direction. However, the lads were not going to desert the friends they had brought into Cawnpore at so much risk; ever since the siege had begun they had been unremitting in their attentions.

"Yes, I'm going to the well," repeated Claude. "You see, poor Mr. Heaton is in a high fever, and constantly crying out for water."

"He must have it, then," answered Reg. "I'll help you, old chap. But I fear that wound is going to prove fatal."

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That evening, shortly after dusk had fallen, the two lads crept from the trench into the centre of the square, and lay down for a few moments as soon as they had reached the well, listening for sounds of the enemy.

Curiously enough, however, the mutineers seemed to have tired of their work, for the rebel guns and muskets were silent.

"I wish it had been otherwise," whispered Claude, "for then the sounds would have drowned the creaking of the wheel. But we must chance it. Here is the end of the rope. Just make it fast to the pail."

"I've done so," answered Reg a moment later.

"Then, lower it over the edge gently, and hold on till it has stopped swinging."

"Right! It's hanging over the centre."

"Then, lie down, old man. Keep the coping between you and the rebels. I'll lower away."

Standing at the end of the windlass Claude began to turn the handle gently, endeavouring to create as little noise as possible. But no amount of oil would silence those wheels, and scarcely had the bucket descended half-way when a creaking sound broke the silence, penetrating to the lines of the enemy. At once shouts arose, and muskets flashed in the distance. Then the boom of a gun was heard, and directly afterwards every weapon possessed by the sepoy was turned towards the well.

Claude might not have heard the noise, he might have been entirely deaf, so unmoved was he by the commotion. Keeping his place staunchly, he lowered the pail as rapidly as possible, waited for it to fill, and then began to haul up again. And

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all the while a storm of bullets swept about him, one even striking the windlass. But he bore a charmed life, and presently was lying behind the coping beside his brother, with the precious water close at hand.

"Warm work, Reg, old boy!" he shouted gaily. "What a row those fellows are kicking up! Ah! listen to that!"

As he spoke a monster cannon-ball crashed into one of the buildings close at hand, and passed completely through it, scattering bricks and mortar in all directions. Instantly shrieks of terror arose.

"Some of the poor women and children hurt!" said Reg fiercely. "Let us go and help!"

Catching up the pail they ran across the open to the door and entered. Within was a scene which brought tears of pity to their eyes. Huddled together upon the floor were numerous children of all ages, the majority fast asleep, peacefully dreaming while the fiends outside sought to slay them. Here and there amongst them were the mothers, with careworn anxious faces, and big staring eyes. But they were used by now to the terrors of the scene, and they were quietly nursing their infants, pacifying a few of the little children who had been awakened by the noise, or attending to a few unfortunate soldiers who lay wounded in one corner.

"What has happened?" asked Claude, looking round by the aid of the light given by a couple of flaring lamps. "Is anyone hit?"

"No one here," was the answer, "but the shell entered the other room, and Mrs. Heaton says that her husband has been killed."

The two lads at once made their way to a door in the

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farther wall, and entered a smaller apartment, which was also lighted by a lamp. It was in a condition of disorder, for one corner had disappeared, together with a portion of the roof, and there was a huge hole in the opposite wall. Here attention was attracted by a pile of fallen masonry in the corner, beside which knelt Mrs. Heaton and her daughters.

As the lads entered, the lady rose from her knees and advanced towards them.

"God's will be done!" she said simply. "My poor husband was at death's door, and we three were attending to him, when suddenly a shot crashed into the wall, causing a pile of bricks to fall upon and kill him. It is God's will that his life should be taken. Now that he is gone, I will devote myself to the children. Ah, how good and brave of you! I see you have brought the water you promised. Alas! it is too late for my purpose, but there are others who will need it."

Too grieved to answer her, the lads bowed and retired.

"How I wish we could get to closer quarters with those fiends!" said Claude bitterly, when they were back in the trenches. "If we were alone here it would be a different matter. But it is horrible to see those poor things suffering. Why don't we go out and spike those guns?"

He asked the question almost fiercely, and seeing an officer who commanded one of the guns creeping past him along the trench at that moment, he touched him on the shoulder and repeated the question.

"That's what we're all saying," was the answer. "We've stood it long enough, and now something is to be done, I believe."

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"When? Who is to go with the sortie-party, and when does it leave?" asked Claude eagerly.

"Just before dawn, I believe. As to the party, I suppose volunteers will be called for."

"Then you can put me down," exclaimed Claude promptly.

"I'm for it too," cried Reg. "You'll promise to take us, won't you?"

"I will. Make your minds easy," was the answer. "We want the best and bravest from the trenches."

Delighted at the prospect in view, the lads lay down to wait for instructions. They had dozed for about two hours, when they were called away to help in a dismal ceremony. A small procession set out from the central building, and wended its way to one side of the entrenchment, passed along a covered way, composed of carts, and halted finally at an intensely dark spot. There was the sound of weeping, while some dark figures were kneeling, praying in low tones. Then silently, with every care and reverence that these cruel times would allow, four bodies were lowered into a dry well, the only burying-place to which the besieged had access.

That done, Claude and Reg supported Mrs. Heaton and her daughters back to their room, and repaired once more to the trenches.

"The sortie-party will collect down at the east end," said the gunner officer, coming to them as they got to their places. "Take rifles with bayonets fixed, and do not carry swords; they would hamper your movements."

Acting on his advice, both lads discarded their belts, and were on the point of leaving for the rendezvous appointed, when a blazing carcass struck one of the two buildings

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occupied by the women and children. No sooner had the flames obtained a firm hold than every gun possessed by the mutineers was turned in that direction, while some thousands, gathering together, rushed to the assault, hoping to exterminate the hated feringhees.

CHAPTER IX

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EVERY man to his post! The enemy are rushing upon us!"

The words of command rang out in the air, and instantly every soldier and every civilian in the trenches grasped his rifle and levelled it. Beside each man lay five or six more weapons, ready loaded, for at this period in the siege ammunition was abundant and rifles numerous.

"Hold your fire till you hear the signal," now came in stentorian tones from the officer who was second in command. "Get those guns loaded with grape and put in a double charge. Now, steady all! We'll wait till those villains are near and teach them a lesson."

Less than a minute had passed since the mutineers commenced their onward rush towards the defences, but so good was the discipline that each man was already at his post, waiting for the word to fire. Peering over the wall, or through the embrasures, they beheld some thousands of frantic sepoys, with whom were a large sprinkling of the riffraff of the native town, charging headlong towards them. They were armed with muskets and with tulwars, and waved them in the air, while each man shouted wildly to encourage himself and cheer on his comrades.

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Lying side by side Claude and Reg watched the attacking horde with feelings of excitement and exultation.

"Just wait," said Claude eagerly. "When we get them within close range we'll simply blow them away, for they are crowded as close together as possible. I'm going to put an extra ball into my rifle."

He felt in his pouch and rapidly rammed down the second bullet, his example being followed by Reg, and by the little Rajah, who, true to his English friends, lay close beside them, looking almost as determined as themselves.

"Pass the word to be ready!" was now loudly ordered, and as each man adjusted his rifle still more nicely, the command "Fire!" rang out.

The roar of exploding guns drowned the shouts of the oncoming multitude. The sharp rattle of musketry followed and was continued for more than a minute, when the guns again belched forth their deadly contents. Then a puff of wind blew the smoke away and allowed the defenders to look upon their assailants once more.

"They are retreating," shouted Claude excitedly. "Let us charge down upon them."

He sprang to his feet and waved his rifle above his head, but he was immediately dragged under cover again by the powerful arms of Joe Jenkins, who was now a close adherent of the lads.

"What are you up to?" he growled savagely. "Keep yer noddle down, or else them villains'll pot yer. Look at that! Ain't yer glad I hauled yer down?"

He pointed to a spot, not many feet away, where the sun-dried earth was pounded by a storm of missiles into a fine dust.

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"Them brutes in the buildings yonder spotted yer," he said. "That's the sauce they meant to kill yer with. Hillo! what's the row now?"

"The hospital is in flames, and I want volunteers to rescue the women and children," shouted the second in command at this moment. "Quick, or all will be burned to death!"

Without waiting to see if he were followed, he rushed across the open to the barrack, which had been struck by a blazing carcass a few minutes before. At once Claude and his friends raced after him, and they were quickly joined by some twenty more. As they neared the burning building, terrified women and children rushed from the door. Then, in a moment, the mutineers opened upon them with guns and musketry, and as the rescue-party advanced at a run, several of the poor helpless people were knocked down.

"We must get them under cover at once," cried the officer. "I'll leave you lads to do it, while I return to the walls and see that something is done to keep down the fire of the rebels. Quick, lads! there are wounded men in the house, besides women and children."

Heedless of the bullets which pattered around and struck the walls with loud-sounding thuds, Claude and Reg ran across the open space and entered the building.

"Carry out the children," shouted the former. "Stop, though. Bring them all together here and wait till our guns get to work, then rush across to the other building."

A moment later the nine guns spoke out with a roar, while those who were left at the defences plied their rifles with such zeal and rapidity that the fire of the enemy was subdued to some extent. This was the opportunity for the rescuers, and,

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led by Claude, they each took up a child under both arms, and darted into the open.

Phit! phit! buzz! Even now the bullets whizzed with unpleasant frequency, striking the walls or the ground at their feet. Unhappily one found a billet, for, hitting a brawny soldier upon the head, it killed him instantly, sending him crashing to the ground, together with the infants he carried.

Claude dashed across to the neighbouring building, and then, having deposited his charges there, returned for the two unfortunate children who lay upon the ground.

"Come back again at once, boys," he shouted when these too were under cover. "There are the women to rescue as well as the wounded."

Once more the gallant party crossed the open and dived into the blazing building. Blinding, suffocating smoke filled the interior, but it could not stop them. Tying handkerchiefs or scraps of linen over their faces, the rescuers groped about the floor, and brought out all they could find; then they retired to their trenches, for to enter again was impossible, while to stand without meant death from the bullets of the mutineers.

"We've done all that was possible," said Claude, "but I fear that many poor people have lost their lives. Did you see the Heatons, Reg?"

"Yes, they have escaped," answered his brother. "They were as brave as lions, and, like many of the other ladies, they helped to carry the children across. This work is awful, Claude. If we men were alone I could bear it, but to see women and children shot down is terrible."

"It is. It is heart-breaking. But if it were not for these

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helpless ladies I doubt whether we should fight so hard. I don't know, though. Now that I come to think of it, to give in to these fiends means death to everyone, and, knowing that, each man will struggle on to the last. Still, the fact that the lives of others depend upon our exertions makes us all the more determined. What do you think the end will be?"

"Can't say," answered Reg, shaking his head dubiously. "It is being whispered that food is running short. That would make it impossible to resist longer."

"Then we shall have to close together and fight our way out," said Claude emphatically. "We could never surrender; these fiends would cut us to pieces."

"The sahib is right," remarked Ikand, who was close at hand. "Your servant has talked this matter over with those of his country who are within the defences, having proved loyal to their masters. They say: 'If food runs out let each man think first as his religion bids him, and then let him slay those of the ladies and children who are his, and afterwards himself. Thus will they save themselves from treachery and murder.'"

"I agree with you," Claude replied with a shudder. "But it will not come to that, Ikand. If things get worse with us we must make a sortie; only, if it is to be done, it must be soon, for our casualties are heavy."

For twenty long days did the gallant but ever-dwindling garrison hold out, and during that time, though surrounded by every horror it is possible to conceive, though threatened by death at every turn, and harassed by bombs and showers of bullets, they never once relaxed their efforts. If some particularly dangerous post was made vacant by an unfortu-

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nate shot, there were volunteers eager to fill it. Each man in the defences of Cawnpore was a hero, and many have their names inscribed upon England's rolls of honour. Mackillop, who was no soldier, but a man of peace, acted as water-drawer. Despite the risks he ran he became, at his own desire, captain of the well, and thither, by day or by night, he gallantly went, drawing the life-giving fluid for the ladies and children. Alas! A sepoy bullet struck him mortally within a week of the commencement of the siege, and he died begging a comrade to fulfil a promise he had made, and draw water for some suffering woman. Delafosse, Ewart, Hallidy, Stirling, and many others have left records of bravery which show what Britons can do when they are brought to bay. But all their efforts, all their devotion and self-sacrifice, were useless; at last the fatal day arrived when ammunition and food both came to an end.

On the same day a letter was sent into the entrenchment by the Nana sahib, offering terms.

"It has come at last," said Claude despondently, as he and his friends sat at their posts discussing the news. "We can hold this place no longer, and we are too few in numbers, and the enemy too many, to permit us to march out. The time has come when we must face surrender, or do as Ikand proposed."

"Ain't there no way out of it, then, sir?" asked Joe, who was one of the party. "I tell yer I don't trust these niggers. They'd round on us once we was in their hands and unarmed."

"He speaks the truth, Claude sahib," said the little Rajah suddenly. "Listen to what I say, and beware how you accept these terms that are offered. A tale has reached me from

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outside, and it is this. While we in here have been fighting for life, this Nana sahib, who has already proved a false friend to you English, has been murdering all who have fallen into his power. More than a hundred helpless women and children, who were flying from other towns in search of safety at Cawnpore, have been butchered by this fiend. Yes, outside these walls, and almost within sight of your soldiers, the foulest murders have taken place. Now, will you still believe the word of this Nana? Will you listen to his terms, and trust yourselves and those whom you care for in his hands?"

For a minute and more the voices of all were hushed, and no one answered the Rajah. Then Claude started forward with a cry of horror.

"More than a hundred ladies and children butchered in cold blood!" cried Claude aghast. "Why, he is an inhuman wretch! A perfect tiger!"

"He is more," said the Rajah quietly, eyeing his friend with some amount of interest. "He is a cunning, scheming monster, with smiling lips and eyes, but with cruel hate in his heart. I tell you that if you and your comrades surrender you are as good as dead."

"But what can we do?" asked Claude. "Food and ammunition are done, and we have the women and children to think of. I know that those in command have practically agreed to the terms, much as they dislike the idea of surrender."

"If they have agreed to them, there is no need that you should, Claude sahib," said the Rajah eagerly. "Listen," he went on, drawing them closer to him, and speaking rapidly in whispers. "Why should you and those whom we brought hither give your lives and bodies to be tortured by this Nana?"

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Ikand and I have talked with one another, for we have foreseen this day of surrender. We have devised a plan by which you and your friends may be saved. Agree to it. Put yourselves in our hands, and now that the opportunity has arrived let the Rajah of Rowpoor repay a portion of the debt he owes you."

"But how could you help us?" asked Claude. "Besides, we could not desert our comrades."

"Claude sahib, you must," replied the Prince earnestly, grasping him by the hand. "Do not think of such matters at this time, I beseech you, for I know full well that the Nana means treachery. Persuade your comrades to resist if you can, but if not, then save yourself and your particular friends."

"He is right, Claude," said Reg after a long pause. "I fully believe that once we march out of Cawnpore to surrender we shall be set upon and murdered by Dhoondoo Punt. He has proved that he is a double-dealer and a rascal. I propose, therefore, that we endeavour to persuade our comrades to refuse the terms, and, failing that, put ourselves into the Rajah's hands."

Accordingly, after some further discussion, Claude and Reg approached the officers on the subject. But no amount of argument would alter their decision; and it was not to be wondered at, for what else could those in command of the garrison do? If they rejected the terms starvation stared them in the face; and could they sit still and watch those unhappy ladies and children die by inches? No. A thousand times no. It had been hard enough to see them struck down by the remorseless bullets; but to watch them starve was more than the most determined could face. And, besides,

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each had a lurking hope that the Nana sahib would hold to his word. True, Claude and Reg had told them of the murder of ladies and children almost within sight of the trenches, but that might only be a rumour. And, therefore, hoping and acting for the best, the terms were accepted and arrangements made for the survivors of the garrison to march down to the ghaut (landing-place) on the banks of the Ganges, and there embark in boats for Allahabad.

Claude and Reg returned with sad hearts to their posts, and told the little Prince that they were now prepared to listen to any plans he might have made for their escape.

"Only, you must fully understand this," said Claude gravely; "we must take Mrs. Heaton, her two daughters, and Joe with us, or we will not come with you at all."

"Your news rejoices my heart," answered the Rajah. "Had it been likely that you would have given your consent I should have urged that we four go alone. But I knew that you would not; for have not you and Reg sahib shown that you are true to your friends, and never more so than when danger threatens them? This is a real danger, sahibs, and you do well to fall in with my wishes.

"Now hear my plans, and act upon them. Already the news is spread that the garrison will march out to-morrow morning, and that being so we will leave the entrenchment to-night."

"But how?" asked Claude doubtfully. "It seems impossible."

"Not impossible, sahib. But difficult and dangerous, I admit. Still, if fortune will favour us we shall escape. Now, hear me. When the dusk falls bring your friends down to

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this part of the entrenchment, and bid them dress in clothes which shall be provided. Yourselves, Ikand, and I will don the uniform of the sepoy, while the ladies must dress as Muhammadans. The disguises for them will be easy to obtain, and as they consist of abundant folds of linen our friends will be covered completely. For your faces, hands, and feet, Ikand has prepared a dye which will serve the purpose."

"But these disguises," cried Claude. "Where and how can you obtain them?"

"Very easily, sahib. Ikand can creep from here into the native town, and return, with as much ease as you and I can sit here and converse. Leave it to him. As the sun goes down he will leave us, and will return soon after night has fallen. That he will be successful I have no doubt, as the fact that we have accepted the terms of surrender will throw the sepoy off their guard and make them less watchful. As to the dresses, there will be many lying about the native town."

"And afterwards? What happens when we are disguised?" asked Claude.

"You will follow Ikand and myself, who will lead you beyond the town to the river. There is a boat-house beyond the ghaut. In it we will hide till the moment comes to take to the river. And then, sahibs, safety and a welcome awaits you at Allahabad."

The little Rajah's features, which were usually grave, broke into a smile of pleasant anticipation as he said the words.

"Yes, sahibs," he repeated, "a welcome awaits you. After that, if the mutiny is at an end, perhaps you will accompany me to Rowpoor again, and help me to regain my own, and punish the upstart. Indoo Khan."

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"We will! We will!" exclaimed the lads heartily.

"And now, as it is getting towards evening, we will communicate our intentions to the Heatons," said Claude. "At dusk we will all meet here again."

Leaving the Rajah and Ikand to complete their plans, Claude and Reg crossed to the central buildings. There was now no need to hurry, as an armistice had been declared, and one might show oneself in the open without fear of being greeted by a shower of bullets. The ladies and children were for the most part sitting outside in the shade, enjoying for the first time for twenty days a little peace and quietness. Indeed, a hush had fallen over the group, and in spite of the fact that the terms of surrender promised safety, all looked downcast and sad. No tears, however, were shed. Long ago they had wept their eyes dry, and now they sat pondering sadly upon the losses they had sustained. Not one but had seen a husband, a sister, or a child slain by the ruthless mutineers. Their cup of bitterness was too full to allow them to rejoice now that all danger seemed to be gone. Instead, they sat there listless and despondent, caring nothing for the peace to come.

Mrs. Heaton and her daughters were showing a fine example to their sisters, for they were busily engaged in tending to the wounded.

"We would like to speak to you for a few moments, please," said Claude, approaching them. "Can you come a little way into the square?"

The faces of the three ladies betrayed some astonishment, but they at once consented and walked with the lads towards the well.

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"What have you to say to us?" asked Mrs. Heaton. "It is something serious, I can see."

"It is," answered Claude. "Mrs. Heaton, would you say, from your knowledge of the sepoys in general, that they will be true to their promise once they have us at their mercy outside the walls? Do you not think that, having gone so far, and murdered some hundred and more helpless ladies, they will not be satisfied till they have slain all?"

"Hush! Oh, do not let the others hear what you say," exclaimed Mrs. Heaton, drawing the boys farther away from the group of ladies and children. "Do I trust the promise of the Nana sahib? No! Emphatically, no! Both I and my dear girls feel sure that he and his soldiers will fall upon us. But what can we do? There seems to be no hope of our being rescued for some time to come, so if we do not surrender now we must die of starvation, as our provisions are exhausted. Anything would be better than that. It is too horrible to think of."

She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears; but in a moment she had recovered her composure, and was facing them bravely again.

"What have you to say?" she asked suddenly. "Surely you cannot hope to help—but—let me hear what it is. You have proved so brave and so thoughtful during these three terrible weeks that I feel sure you have come now to do something for us."

"We have," answered Claude earnestly. "We have come to offer you and your daughters some hope of safety. Like you, we believe the Nana will break his word, and therefore, sooner than put him to the test, we have decided to leave the

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defences to-night, taking with us you three and Joe Jenkins. The little Rajah and Ikand will guide us, and all will be disguised. Now, will you trust yourselves to us again?"

"We will," Mrs. Heaton replied promptly. "When shall we join you?"

"At dusk. Slip away in the darkness, and say nothing."

Claude and Reg at once returned to the trenches, and lay down to rest, as they knew they would want all their energy and strength that night. When at last darkness fell, Mrs. Heaton and her daughters joined them. Soon after, a figure appeared suddenly before them, bearing a large bundle on his shoulders. It was Ikand, who at once threw his burden to the ground and salaamed.

"All the disguises are there, sahibs," he said quietly. "Ikand had no difficulty, as the native lines are empty, while the sepoys and the civilians feast and prepare for to-morrow."

"Did you hear any rumours of intended treachery?" asked Claude.

"None, sahib. But the people are strangely elated. Now look at this bundle. Your servant has brought sepoy uniforms for the sahibs and their soldier friend, also for his highness. Here are also dresses for the ladies. Will you please to don them while Ikand prepares the dye?"

The little party separated, but soon reassembled in their disguises. Fortunately Ikand had had the good sense to choose the largest uniforms obtainable for Claude, Reg, and Joe, for all three were decidedly bigger than the average sepoy.

Ikand then went the round with his jar of stain, and dyed the hair, faces, hands, and feet of his masters and their English friends.

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"It's not very pleasant, I must admit," said Mrs. Heaton, as she submitted to the operation, "but it may mean life to us."

At length all were ready, and Ikand, who seemed to be able to see as clearly in the darkness as in broad daylight, after peering closely at them, expressed his satisfaction.

"Now," said Claude, "let us see to the priming of our weapons before we leave. Ladies, here are three pistols. Hide them beneath your dresses and use them if necessary. Now we're ready to move. Joe, you take your station directly behind us, Reg and I will walk on either side of Mrs. Heaton and her daughters, while Ikand and the Rajah go ahead. We are ready. Lead on, Prince."

"Then follow closely, Claude sahib, and when you hear me imitate the chirrup of a cricket, halt and lie down. It will mean that danger threatens."

Pausing one moment to look about them, and to offer up a prayer for their safety, the little party stole through an embrasure, squeezing past the gun to the farther side of the wall. Then they set out across the plain in the order arranged.

Not a soul was stirring. The rebel troops seemed to have been withdrawn, but down by the native town the glimmer of many fires was seen, while shouts and the dull thud, thud of the tom-tom could be heard. Some ten minutes later, when the fugitives were well away from the trenches, a thin crescent of the moon rose in the heavens and shed just sufficient light to help them on their way. They pressed on rapidly, and soon reached the river bank.

And now came the difficult part of the journey. To reach

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the boat-house they must pass by the ghaut from which the garrison of Cawnpore was to embark on the following morning. They had almost reached it, and were passing along a narrow track which led through a thicket of trees, when suddenly all were brought to a halt by the sharp chirrup of a cricket. A moment later the Rajah appeared.

"Come forward, Claude sahib," he said. "We are in a difficult position, and need your advice."

Hastening forward with him, Claude found Ikand crouching at the edge of the wood looking into the open.

"See," he whispered; "the Nana sahib comes, and with him all the sepoy's."

Throwing himself upon the ground, Claude peered between the leaves, and saw a sight which filled him with consternation. Close at hand was the ghaut, a structure of white stone, upon which the moonbeams played, showing plainly the minarets of the buildings which adjoined it, and being reflected brightly from the surface of the Ganges. The rays also fell upon thousands of upturned eyes which looked towards a central figure. It was Dhoondoo Punt, the traitorous and cruel Nana sahib, who was mounted upon an elephant, haranguing a multitude of the mutineers.

"Listen, Claude sahib, and hear what the traitor of Bhitoor has to say," whispered the Rajah. "See! he is pointing to that line of elephants standing in the shadow."

The Rajah motioned to a grove of trees opposite, where the gigantic forms of the animals could be dimly seen. They were laden with cases, which were roped to their backs.

"There is the treasure of Cawnpore," the Nana sahib was saying. "There is a small part of the reward you will win.

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To-morrow, when the feringhees are gone, the spoil shall be divided, and after that there is more to win. Riches shall pour upon you, and each man shall have sufficient to keep him in luxury till his dying day if he will follow me and be one of my soldiers. The last of the Moguls who sits now at Delhi will not suit you. He and his sons will grind you down to poverty as did their forefathers. Throw in your lot, therefore, with me. I will see that you are well rewarded, and if only you raise me to the throne I will guarantee a life of ease and luxury such as you have never even dreamed of. Now, what will you do?"

"We will fight for you, Nana sahib!" shouted the mob. "Lead us on against the sons of Sheitan, and afterwards, when they are swept away, we will take you in triumph to the throne!"

"It is good to hear you," answered Dhoondoo Punt, with difficulty suppressing his exultation. "To-morrow you shall see how the Nana sahib of Bhitoor keeps his word. I promise you division of the treasure, and perhaps even more. Now go to your houses. Remember, to-morrow shall be a day of happiness."

He signalled to them to depart, and, giving a hasty order, was borne away on his elephant. Then the crowd of mutineers melted into the darkness, and, taking advantage of the confusion and hurrying, Claude and his party boldly issued from the shadows and crossed the ghaut. Suddenly two mutineers stumbled against them and brought them to a halt.

"An accident, my good comrades," cried one. "The darkness is so thick just here that you might even be feringhees

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and we not know it. Good-night! To-morrow the Nana of Bhitoor will rejoice our hearts."

"Yes, to-morrow," rejoined Claude roughly. "Good-night!"

The men passed on without suspicion, and the fugitives pressed forward once more. Half an hour later a big stone building appeared in front of them. Led by Ikand the party crept to the water's edge, waded through thick mud till they were beneath the house, and then climbed up on a narrow platform. This led to the back of the building, and ended in a ladder, which all mounted. They found themselves in a room with low, sloping ceiling, upon the floor of which sails and cordage were scattered.

"Sahibs, this is your refuge," said Ikand. "Here you will wait until the Nana has kept or broken his promise. If he keeps it, we will push out at once in the boat that is below and join our friends. If not, we will remain till the danger is past. Sleep, sahibs. Ikand will keep watch for you."

The faithful fellow disappeared as quietly as a shadow, and soon silence reigned in the boat-house, broken only by the heavy breathing of the fugitives.

CHAPTER X

A Ghastly Tragedy

SAHIBS, awake!" cried Ikand from the foot of the ladder a little after dawn. "Rise now, and bid the memsahibs (ladies) open their eyes and prepare, for the day is come! Awake, and make ready. Soon the garrison of Cawnpore will reach the river, and the Nana sahib of Bhitoor will do as his heart dictates."

At the words Claude and his men friends rose to their feet, and descended the ladder. Then creeping cautiously to the entrance of the boat-house, they looked out across the river. As yet the opposite side, which marked the limit of the kingdom of Oudh, was indistinguishable, for a thick gray mist hung close above the water. But scarcely had the party taken up their positions, and carefully screened themselves behind a mass of wicker baskets, which were evidently used by fishermen, when the hot rays of the rising sun pierced the vapour and dispelled it. Then in an instant the whole landscape was spread out before them, and turning their eyes up the river they beheld the ghaut, or landing-stage, with the pinnacle of a temple rising from behind it, while trees filled in the background.

"I see the boats prepared for the garrison," cried Claude

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suddenly. "They are moored in the shallow water close to the ghaut, and have thatched coverings over them."

"Forty in all," said Reg, counting them carefully. "They are big, too, so there is ample room for all of our friends. It begins to look as though the Nana would keep his word, in which case all our trouble, and the risk we ran last night, will have been useless."

"It may turn out so," answered his brother, "and I fervently hope it will; but I am doubtful; for when a man can play a double game, as the Nana has done, why, he is capable of anything. If, however, he keeps his word, we shall be no worse off, and shall have the satisfaction of feeling that we acted for the best."

"Time will show," said the little Rajah. "I tell you, Claude sahib, within an hour or more you and your friends will have cause to bless the thought which prompted your action last night. Do not regret it because only a few could come with you. To have asked many more to join would have destroyed your own chances; and besides, did not the greater part have such faith in the Nana as to cause them to refuse to listen to your warnings? They had surrendered, and they would trust the leader of the mutineers to treat them well. That was their answer. You, on the other hand, believed that some act of treachery would result, and you refused to join in the surrender. May you prove to have been wrong, for the sake of your comrades! But, I tell you, tales, whispers of some treachery afoot, reached our ears, and it will be strange if something does not come of them. But here is Ikand. What is it now?"

"I have food and drink for the sahibs," said the native,

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salaaming. "While you all slept I crept into the country, and entered the barracks of the soldiers. Cakes were there in abundance, and I took also a gourd of milk."

"Good!" cried Claude. "We are famishing. Let us call the ladies, and set to. When do you think the garrison will embark, Ikand?"

"In an hour perhaps, sahib. There is no one at the ghaut just now, so the time has not yet arrived. While you eat I will keep watch from here, and will warn you when they come in sight."

Accordingly the men of the party gathered at the back of the boat-house, where they were joined by Mrs. Heaton and her daughters. Then the food which Ikand had obtained was divided, and all partook of it with feelings of thanksgiving, for during the last week of the siege they had been almost starved. Indeed, had there been double the quantity of cakes they would have quickly disappeared, so huge were their appetites. The fugitives were able, however, to supplement the cakes and milk with bananas which they found growing close at hand.

"I feel better," said Claude, when he had finished, going across to the little Rajah, whose caste compelled him to eat apart. "That food, and the sense of freedom, have put new life into me. Now, Mrs. Heaton, I think it will be just as well if you and the girls climb the ladder again. You see, everything may turn out all right; but, on the other hand, we might be discovered here, and have to make a fight for it; so it will be better for us men to be alone. We shall have far more confidence if we know that you are out of danger."

"Then we will leave you, Claude. We will go to the loft

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above, and will pray that no more fighting and bloodshed may take place. For ourselves we have no fear, as we have perfect faith in you and your brave companions. But it is for the others that we tremble, those who are in the hands of the Nana of Bhitoor."

Scarcely had the ladies disappeared in the gloom above, when Ikand's voice was heard calling softly.

"Sahibs," he said, "I can see a procession of men and women approaching the ghaut. They are those who have surrendered at Cawnpore."

"Then we shall very soon know how they are to be treated," said Claude in anxious tones. "God grant that that fiend may be true to his word! But I am terribly afraid that his cruel nature will not allow him to miss such a splendid opportunity of wreaking his hate. We know what he is. But we must make some preparations for defence, in case we are discovered. Let Ikand and Joe go to one side, and you with them, Reg. The Rajah and I will post ourselves on the opposite staging. Keep well behind the baskets, and, if anyone comes near, remain where you are, for your lives. I need not tell you what to do if we are discovered, but I think that tulwars and swords only should be used, so as to avoid a general alarm."

A minute later the five fugitives were crouching upon the beaten earth flooring of the boat-house. Between the two parties was a strip of water, upon which floated a native boat. In front of them was a litter of baskets, smelling strongly of fish. But, however unpleasant they might be, they afforded excellent cover, and at the same time allowed all to obtain a clear view of the river.

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Some hundreds of yards away, and yet appearing close at hand, so clear was the morning atmosphere, was the ghaut, its white paved steps flashing in the sunlight, and bathed at their foot by the rippling eddies of the River Ganges, which stretched away in a broad stream to east and west, till it was hidden by curving banks and an abundance of vegetation. Upon the ghaut were massed numerous sepoy and natives, and amongst them, mounted upon an elephant, the Nana sahib himself. They were watching a long line of white people who were slowly approaching.

"The garrison!" exclaimed Claude. "Poor things! they can hardly walk. Their wretched appearance makes me realize fully what an awful experience we have all come through."

"But for all that," said Reg, "they hold their chins well in the air, and look as undaunted as ever."

Never was seen a more mournful or piteous procession. Not one of the survivors but was worn out by hardship and the constant watchfulness that had been necessary to guard against the incessant and harassing tactics of the mutineers, and, in addition, all had been more or less starved, and had been exposed to a merciless sun during the hottest season of the year. The terrible ordeal had so reduced them that as they moved forward their feet faltered, and many of them tottered and would have fallen but for the aid of those beside them. Nevertheless, as Reg remarked, those who could, bore themselves bravely, the men carrying their arms in a manner which showed that they were still able and willing to use them if necessary. As for the unfortunate women, they toiled along with what remained of the children, seeming to have suffered so much that they cared little what now befel them.

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"The Nana is sending men to help them embark," said Claude a few minutes later, as the procession drew up on the ghaut. "They are beginning with the sick and wounded, and are placing them beneath the thatch awnings built over the boats. It looks as though we had frightened ourselves unnecessarily. I believe the Nana sahib means to fulfil his promise of freedom and safe custody to Allahabad."

"It would seem so, Claude sahib," said the little Rajah. "But wait, I beg of you. Do not, as you value our lives, show yourself at the opening. Remember that the Nana of Bithoor pretended to be England's friend up to the very last moment. He may be even now waiting till the surrendered garrison is embarked. He is cruel enough to allow their hopes to be raised to the highest, and then to snatch freedom from them, when safety and the friends they long to greet seem to be in sight. Trust him not, sahib, for he does not deserve your confidence."

"Now the women and children are embarking," cried Reg from the opposite side of the boat-house. "Look at the poor things, Claude. The water is too shallow for the boats to come alongside the landing-steps, so they have all to wade through the mud."

More than half an hour elapsed before the women and children, together with the sick and wounded, were all embarked upon the forty boats. Then the men broke from their ranks and waded into the shallow water. At length they too had taken their places, and had packed what little kit they had.

"There goes the signal for them to start," cried Claude, seeing an officer rise in his seat in the foremost boat and

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wave to the others. "Yes, they are pushing off. Hurrah, they are off for freedom, for friends and safety! Thank God the Nana has kept his word!"

Bitter was the disappointment in store for Claude and his friends, for scarcely had he, in his excitement and thankfulness at the apparent safety of his late comrades, uttered the last sentence when a shrill bugle-note blew out from the dense growth of trees that grew in front of the temple standing beside the ghaut. At the signal the native boatmen on the forty craft leaped overboard and hurried ashore, and then, ah horror! the crash and roar of artillery thundered across the water, while four jets of smoke and flame belched from behind screens of leaves high up on the ghaut, sending a hail of grape into the very midst of the surrendered garrison.

"Treachery!" shouted Claude, unable to restrain his indignation at the sight. "The Nana has turned his guns upon our comrades, upon the women and children, and upon the helpless sick and wounded. Look! The sepoy's have now commenced to fire with their rifles. Murderers! Villains! Let us rush out to the rescue."

"Yes. To the rescue!" repeated Reg eagerly, springing to his feet upon the other side of the boat-house. "We cannot sit still and see our comrades butchered."

Leaping over the piled-up baskets, he stood there for a moment to wait for Claude and the others. But there was a wiser and a steadier head to be reckoned with, one which realized that help from such a small party would be futile, and end only in disaster. Joe Jenkins came to the fore in this emergency. By no means wanting in fire and courage, he had yet the discretion which comes to every old soldier who

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has seen active service. Springing to his feet he followed Reg, and picking him up in his arms without ceremony carried him behind the shelter of the baskets.

"Keep quiet for yer life, sir!" he growled. "Jist remember them as is in the room above, awaitin' for freedom. Do yer want to see them, as well as all the others, slaughtered before yer eyes? Lie still, I tell yer!"

It was useless for Reg to struggle when held in such powerful arms, and though for a minute his anger was great, yet, being a sensible lad, he quickly realized that Joe had done right in restraining him. Then Claude, too, added his words to the soldier's.

"It was my fault, Reg, old boy," he said. "I felt mad when the guns went. But Joe is right. To rush out now would mean certain death to us and to those we have undertaken to protect. We could do nothing against such a force. Lie down again, and watch. Perhaps we shall have to fight before very long, for they are following one of the boats down the river."

"It is the only one that has managed to get under weigh," burst in the Rajah. "Lie down, sahibs, and watch. Soldiers are on the Oudh bank, and as they will be able to see right into this boat-house when opposite to us, we must keep under cover. The people from Cawnpore are doomed."

Though but a few minutes had passed since the shrill bugle-note had sounded, a ghastly tragedy had been enacted before the eyes of the fugitives. The harsh boom of four cannon incessantly rent the air, pouring a storm of grape around and into the assembled boats, the iron hail tearing the water up in all directions, and lashing it into foam. Then hundreds of

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fierce, shouting natives lined both banks of the Ganges, the reports of their rifles almost drowning the shrieks of the hapless victims.

Of the forty boats, thirty-eight were still aground, and the majority were covered with a sheet of flame, for the native boatmen had fired the thatch before leaping overboard. In some, soldiers could be seen desperately using the poles in the endeavour to push off; but in every case they were shot down before their gallantry proved successful. Others were surrounded by their occupants, who had leaped into the stream, and towards these a host of fierce mutineers were now wading, tulwar in hand. Let us draw a veil over the cruel scene which followed. Of the men not one escaped. All were butchered where they stood, while the women and children, numbering in all some hundred and thirty, were ruthlessly dragged ashore, to meet with the same horrible fate a few days later.

"How terrible! What villains!" groaned Claude, covering his eyes to hide the ghastly sight. When he looked again, two boats were floating in mid-stream, having been pushed off by their occupants.

"Stick to it! Paddle for your lives!" cried Claude, as though his voice could reach them at that distance. "Get into the middle of the stream, and row for your lives."

"They cannot, sahib. They are doomed," said the Rajah. "Keep silent, Claude sahib, I beg of you, and lie well beneath the cover, or their fate will be ours also. There! One of the boats is gone."

At that moment the nine-pounders which the gunners of the Nana sahib had turned upon the garrison of Cawnpore

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opened upon the two escaping boats, the discharge from one tearing up the water about that which floated nearest the ghaut. Instantly it began to fill, and in a minute its freight were struggling in the water. Not for long were they allowed to swim, however, for volleys of musketry were poured upon them, and ere long the last of them had sunk beneath the surface.

"The other will escape, I think," cried Reg. "The men on board are paddling hard, and are keeping well in the centre of the stream. It is their only chance, though even there the rifles of the mutineers can reach them."

"Their safety depends upon the aim of the sepoy," replied the Rajah. "If they float till night they will not throw off their pursuers, for look, the horsemen are following."

He pointed to the opposite bank, where mounted sowars could now be seen in scattered parties. They were galloping at their fastest pace along the river, and as soon as each party had ridden to a point below the escaping boat they dismounted and opened a hot fire, some even forcing their horses into the stream in their eagerness to reach the fugitives. Claude and his friends watched the scene with feelings which it would be impossible to describe. They saw a hail of leaden pellets for ever splashing about the boat, and now and again some Englishman on board would toss his hands into the air, and fall dead amongst his companions. As they looked, too, the last paddle slipped from the fingers of one wounded man, and the frail craft was left at the mercy of the eddying stream. Half an hour later the boat was out of sight, but the reports of the sepoy rifles could still be heard.

All that day and night was the boat pursued, and on the

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following day she stranded upon a sand-bank. Now was the chance of the mutineers. A number embarked, and set foot upon the sand-bank, but the fugitives fell upon them and slew them. Again the boat floated, then stranded for a second time. Then, while some pushed her off, three officers and eleven privates drove back the mutineers. When they turned to rejoin their friends, the boat was gone, and it and their comrades have never been heard of again. What fate befell them will probably never be known; but the fortunes of the others have been recorded in history. Finding their retreat by the river cut off, they took possession of a temple, and held it against a horde of mutineers. But smoke and flame drove them forth, seven of the number perishing in the mad fight to reach the river. The survivors took to the water, but three quickly succumbed.

Hunted like wild beasts, wearied with fighting and ceaseless anxiety, the remaining four clung doggedly to their lives, and having floated six miles down the river, landed and obtained the protection of a local potentate, known as Derebijah Sing. Of all the gallant garrison of Cawnpore who had embarked at the ghaut these four alone survived, Captain Thomson and Lieutenant Delafosse, Privates Murphy and Sullivan. Such pluck and endurance are grand examples of the spirit which pervades the British race.

Meanwhile what was happening to the little party in the boat-house?

"We have seen the last of our friends," said Claude mournfully, as the boat floated out of view, "and we have now had the wisdom of our action last night fully brought home to us. The Nana sahib has turned out to be a murderer and

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a ruffian, as the Rajah told us he would. Wait till the tide turns and the English get the upper hand again. Then that human tiger will be hunted to his death. But now about ourselves. We can do nothing while it is daylight, but as soon as darkness falls, I propose that we leave the friendly shelter of this boat-house, and make for Allahabad. Shall we go by road, or by river?"

"By the river," answered the Rajah promptly. "Ikand tells me that the surrounding country swarms with mutineers, and that all the roads are watched. It would be madness, therefore, to attempt to reach our destination by land. Besides, we are all too weak for a long march, and I am sure that the memsahibs could never endure the fatigue. When darkness falls let us embark, and trust to the stream to carry us. A steering-paddle will be sufficient to direct our course, so that while one sits in the stern and handles it, the others may rest. When the dawn is about to break, we will hide in one of the many swamps which lie beside the river."

"It sounds a good plan, and we'll follow it!" said Claude. "For the present we will remain on watch as we are, for some mutineers might come upon us suddenly. At dusk Ikand can go in search of food, and when he returns we will leave."

Accordingly all lay behind the shelter of woven withies, keeping a bright look-out upon the river. But now that the last boat-load of feringhees had disappeared scarcely a sepoy remained in sight, while the ghaut with its gleaming white steps and landing-stage was completely deserted. At dusk Ikand slipped away, and two hours later the whole party embarked, their larder having been replenished by the faithful native.

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"Take your places silently, and lie down, please," said Claude, as he helped Mrs. Heaton and her daughters into the boat. "Now, are all aboard?"

"Yes, all, Claude sahib," whispered the Rajah. "Ikand is posted forward on the look-out, while the steering-oar is ready here for you to handle. The memsahibs, Reg sahib, and the soldier are in the centre."

"Then shove her off," said Claude.

Grasping the gunwale of the boat, he and the Rajah pushed her from the mud and ooze upon which she was partly lying. As her bow was already floating in some inches of water, the operation was not difficult. As soon as she was free the Rajah stepped aboard; Claude waded out till she was clear of the boat-house. Then he halted for a moment, and all remained perfectly still, listening for any warning sounds from the bank. But only silence greeted them, so with one last vigorous push which sent the craft shooting out into the stream, Claude took his place in the stern.

"Now for safety and friends," he said quietly. "Before we left Cawnpore I had made up my mind never to surrender to the mutineers. I am doubly determined upon that point now, for this day has taught us that their promises are not to be relied upon. They are brutal murderers."

"They are," echoed Reg feelingly, "and once our good friends here are in safety, I will take the first opportunity that offers of marching to Cawnpore again to revenge this treachery."

Seating himself in the stern, Claude grasped the steering-oar, and soon directed the boat into the centre of the stream. And there he kept it as well as he could, guiding himself by

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an occasional glimpse of the banks, which he obtained by the help of the light shed by thousands of brilliant stars. It was, indeed, an ideal night for flight down the river, for the surface of the water was shrouded in deep gloom, while above, there was a clear sky, against which the trees that fringed the banks stood out boldly.

Two hours later Reg took Claude's place, and when his turn was done, the Rajah relieved him.

Crash! Scarcely two minutes had passed when the bow suddenly ran violently upon the shore, and the boat came to a stop.

"We've stranded upon a sand-bank!" whispered Claude. "Sit still all of you, while I hop overboard and push her off! Hush! What was that?"

The sharp crack of some breaking branch sounded like a pistol-shot, and all heard the swish of leaves. Crack! there it was again, and close at hand, too.

"It may be some wild beast," said Reg. "Let us get away as quickly as we can."

"Then creep aft, so as to let the stern rise," answered Claude, leaping into the water. "Now, I'll heave her off the sand."

He waded to the bow of the boat, and, grasping the gunwale, pushed with all his strength. He had just freed the craft, and was in the act of stepping aboard, when fierce shouts resounded from the forest, and a number of dark figures rushed into the water. In an instant they were upon him, and though he struggled with all his might he was quickly overpowered. With the rapidity of lightning a cloth was wound about his limbs and over his head, and he was borne

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away into the darkness. As for the boat, propelled by one last despairing thrust from Claude's strong arms, it shot into the stream, and was carried away by the current, its occupants stupefied by the suddenness of their loss, and helpless to return to the rescue of their leader.

CHAPTER XI

In the Hands of the Mutineers

WHILE the frail native craft with its sorrowing occupants is drifting down the lonely reaches of the Ganges; while Claude Watson is borne in a huddled, struggling heap upon the shoulders of his captors into the depths of the jungle, let us turn for a few moments elsewhere, and ascertain the course of the mutiny.

We have already seen that an insurrection commencing some months before in the cantonments of Barrackpore had finally spread like wildfire throughout the northern parts of India. We have followed the outbreak from Meerut, where, practically for the first time in the mutiny, the sepoy massacred the Europeans, to the city of Delhi, where dwelt the last of the once-powerful house of the Moguls. We have seen how a fierce flame of treachery swept over the land, engulfing the Europeans wherever they were stationed, driving them from Delhi, surrounding them at Cawnpore, and menacing their lives on every side. Now let us see how the handful of white people met the trouble.

Desperate times call for prompt and drastic measures, and Sir Henry Lawrence, the commander at Lucknow, seeing the whole of the vast kingdom of Oudh in arms, stemmed the tide of mutiny for a while by disarming the majority of his troops. Thereby he gained a month of re-

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prieve, four weeks all too short to enable him to prepare for a storm which was as inevitable as the day which follows night. Convinced that the lives of all in Lucknow depended upon his action, and that the enormous area of land composing the state of Oudh would slip from the fingers of the British if this, the last foothold, were abandoned, he promptly set all available men to work to prepare a defensive position. The Residency and a few houses surrounding it were chosen, and were hastily prepared by the engineers, while stores of ammunition and food were accumulated. Scarcely was all ready, when the rebel forces of Oudh marched upon Lucknow, and invested the place.

From Delhi the fingers of a brave operator had tapped out a brief warning message. At Lahore the telegraph-receiver had ticked in sympathy, and spelt out the ominous words. The short sentence had been read at Umballa, *en route* to Lahore, and from the latter place it had been sent over the wires to Rawul Pindee and to Peshawur.

"The sepoy's have come in from Meerut, and are burning everything. Mr. Todd is dead, and, we hear, several Europeans. We must shut up."

These were the warning words, and, fortunately for England and for the Punjaub, there were men who understood their full significance, and took prompt measures accordingly. They realized that this was mutiny, not a local rising, but a gigantic, wide-sweeping rebellion, which aimed not only at Britain's power, but at the lives of every white man, woman, and child resident in the country.

They needed no discussion amongst themselves as to their line of action, but promptly determined to face the rebels

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boldly, conscious that to pander to them would be to show weakness, which would lead to inevitable ruin.

At Mean Meer, at Govindghur, at the fort of Philow, described as the "key" of the Punjaub, at Mooltan, Ferozepore, and Kangra preparations were secretly made to disarm the native troops. All day and all night messages and armed men were in motion, and meanwhile the sepoy's lived in a fool's paradise, ignorant of the net which was slowly enfolding them, and all unconscious of the fact that their British masters knew as well as they did that a rising was intended.

The plan was cleverly carried out, and proved successful, for in almost every case the men who were about to mutiny surrendered and gave up their arms.

Mooltan, Peshawur—the latter perhaps the most important of all the posts, for it commanded the entrance to the valley of the Punjaub, and formed, as it were, the barrier between it and the Afghan hills,—and many another garrison were saved by prompt action, instigated as a rule solely by the important message flashed from Delhi.

But there was someone, in addition, whose brains, whose clear foresight, and whose indomitable energy passed the sentence on, spread it broadcast through the Punjaub, and followed it everywhere with orders as to immediate action. In fact it was to this man, to the great Sir John (not the Sir Henry at Lucknow) Lawrence, that the British owed their continued possession of the Punjaub, and, what was of even greater importance, it was to him that the first effort to stem the mutiny was due.

Without hesitation, as keenly as the hound follows the fox, with the huntsman upon his heels, the nearest available troops

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advanced in the direction of the mutineers. The Sikhs, the Punjaub infantry, were won over and added to the tiny army. Hill tribes, who were ever a source of trouble and danger, were induced to join their British masters to fight the hated lowlanders, their hereditary enemies. And thus, by vigorous, undaunted action, with that extraordinary power of persuasion and magnetism which Englishmen are able to bring to bear upon natives in general, a large force of fierce and usually intractable soldiers were induced to join our army and take the field, a visible, tangible proof to all waverers that the power of Britain had not fallen, and that where help was required it would be brought, if need be, at the bayonet's point.

At Umballa the same master-mind soon set troops in motion, for though not present in person, the orders and the advice of Sir John Lawrence came swishing over the telegraph wires, giving clear and concise directions. In a few days, indeed, a body of European troops were ready to take the road for Delhi. Now the difficulty of transport faced the leaders, but it was at once brushed aside, for when called upon to help, the Maharajah of Puttiala and the Rajahs of Jhund and Nabha eagerly joined hands with the British, and supplied troops and wagons in abundance; a convincing proof of the wisdom of allowing them to govern their own states, with the knowledge that there would be no interference so long as they conducted their affairs aright.

Thus, while a column was operating in the north, following closely upon the heels of the mutineers, this second column set out for Delhi, determined to strike at the very heart of the insurrection. With it was the gallant Hodson, lately in

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command of the "Guides", and now assistant-quartermaster-general. Away in front of the force this truly noble man galloped into the open, and, in spite of the hosts of enemies around, rode seventy-six miles, to Meerut, with only a small escort. A couple of hours sufficed to give all particulars of the impending movement, and straightway, having bathed and breakfasted, he was in the saddle again, reaching his comrades after a long and extremely hazardous ride.

As a result of his daring, the force from Umballa marched to join the Meerut brigade before advancing to Delhi. In command of the former was Sir Henry Barnard, while Colonel Archdale Wilson led the troops from the latter place. And now the men who had been kept in hand, who had been compelled to sit idly in their quarters at Meerut while their brothers and sisters were being massacred, showed the stuff of which they were made, for despite the fact that a huge force of mutineers opposed them, outnumbering them by thousands, they rushed furiously upon the enemy and scattered them, sending them back to Delhi at their fastest pace. Twice did the gallant fellows drive the enemy before them, and then they joined hands with the troops from Umballa. Even now the combined force was ridiculously small, numbering in all but three thousand; but, undaunted by the huge odds which they would have to meet, the men cheerfully took the road for Delhi, with Hodson riding miles away in front of them. Indeed this gallant officer was fully in his element, for, accompanied by only a dozen native troopers, he galloped to the very walls of India's capital, and, driving in the sepoy videttes, thoroughly reconnoitred the country.

Acting on his information the main body followed, and,

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sweeping aside the thousands of mutineers who came out to oppose them, took up their position on a ridge overlooking the town. And here we will leave them, clinging tenaciously to it with a determination at which one can only marvel. And yet, while admiring, one can only admit that their action was natural, for on the march to Delhi numbers of fugitives had gained the column, bringing such tales of atrocities and cruelties committed by the mutineers, that each man was imbued with a desire and determination to be revenged.

Meanwhile throughout the north of India the mutiny spread, till Lucknow, Agra, Allahabad, and other posts formed a sanctuary for hundreds of Europeans, while around raged a sea of bloodthirsty sepoys. Elsewhere, in many a place, the Europeans were worsted, being overcome by numbers, and sometimes by the most despicable treachery, and in each case every soul was murdered, the atrocities at Seetapore and Jhansi being peculiarly horrible.

At Calcutta, the seat of the Government, where dwelt Lord Canning, every effort was made to obtain troops to cope with the emergency. They were telegraphed for from Madras, from Ceylon, the Mauritius, and the Cape. On the advice of Sir John Lawrence, others were brought from Persia and from the China seas.

The first to arrive were under Colonel Neill, and he at once went up by train to Benares with sixty men, only to find a mere handful of Europeans there, for the most part civilians. When the natives mutinied, which they did almost at once, Neill and his Fusiliers fell upon them and routed them. Then they turned upon the rebels in the surrounding country, and such was their energy and boldness that they quickly subdued

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them to obedience. News now arrived that Allahabad was in the hands of the sepoy, who had displayed unusual ferocity to the Europeans. Gathering a tiny force, Neill advanced against them, and though too weak to meet them all at once, so harassing were his tactics and so fierce were his attacks that the town was soon in his hands. Then he rode through the surrounding country, dragging mutineers from their lairs, and capturing murderers everywhere. In almost every case they were promptly hanged, a harsh but none too severe punishment. So stern and so relentless was he indeed that soon his name became a terror, while the tale of his deeds went far to quell the mutiny in those parts.

With the troops from Persia came General Havelock, who at once proceeded to Allahabad, arriving on June 28th, the day after the massacre at Cawnpore, from which Claude and his friends had so fortunately escaped. His object was to march upon Cawnpore and then to the relief of Lucknow. Without loss of time, therefore, he gathered what available force there was, amounting in all to some fourteen hundred bayonets, and sending four hundred of these in advance, he followed with the bulk, being accompanied by eighteen mounted Europeans, civilians who had volunteered. We will leave him on the road, to hark back to our hero; but, later, we will return to this gallant leader, for the march upon which he had just set forth was destined to prove a momentous one, and one to live for ever in history.

So firmly had the long cloth been wound about Claude's limbs, and so tightly did the folds hug him, that movement was impossible. Indeed, he could scarcely breathe, and was

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compelled to remain motionless, while his bearers hastened through the forest. Half an hour later they came to a halt in a clearing, and threw their burden down without ceremony.

"There, lie still, feringhee dog!" cried one of them. "Take your rest and ease now, for I promise you that our master will weary you with his punishments."

"Who is he then?" Claude managed to gasp.

"Wait and you shall see," was the jeering answer. "This I will tell you. You are well known to him, and he to you; and if he bears ill-will to the sons of Sheitan, your brothers, then you he hates even more, for it was you who baulked him, and you who caused him to come perilously near losing his life."

"Indoo Khan!" exclaimed Claude apprehensively.

"You shall see," the man answered. "Lie still now, feringhee, for I tell you that my master has promised to do much when you have fallen into his hands. For days we have been upon your track. The best men amongst his servants have smelt you out, and now that they have been successful, they will be rewarded with silver and with something more. There, sleep," he added ominously; "you will have need of all your strength and fortitude."

The man laughed derisively and turned upon his heel, leaving Claude in his uncomfortable position, with his mind for the moment full of uneasiness as to what was to come. He was a prisoner in the hands of natives who were bearing him to their leader. Could that be anyone but Indoo Khan, the general of the Rajah's forces? Impossible! Who else would wish to capture him? Who else had he baulked? What other man had he brought near to death?

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There could be no doubt that it was the dusky general, for had he not fallen forward bleeding into the arms of his followers after Claude's pistol-shot?

"It must be Indoo Khan!" Claude decided. "I know him well enough to be sure that he will put me to the worst tortures before killing me."

At the thought he broke into a cold perspiration and shivered, though the night was intensely hot, and no breeze cooled the atmosphere. But, as he lay there half-stifled, his old hopeful nature came to the fore. And, his courage reviving, he tried to think how best to effect his escape.

"Indoo must be miles away," he thought, "and as I am too heavy to be carried all that distance, they will free my legs and let me walk. That will give me a chance, and I will see what can be done. In the meantime I will take care not to appear in too good spirits. I'll sham that I am terribly afraid, and that, perhaps, will disarm all suspicion."

Accordingly he lay perfectly quiet, and, worn out with his labours of the past three weeks, and a day of ceaseless vigil, he fell asleep. He had slept for more than two hours when he was suddenly awakened by a rough kick from bare toes, and he looked about him to find that the darkness was lifting rapidly.

Over him bent two natives, who were cutting the folds of the cloth which bound his limbs. That done they lashed his wrists together with the same material, and leaving his legs free bade him rise.

"Stand up, feringhee pig," said the man who had previously addressed him. "We are about to take you to our master, but we will not carry you there. No, you shall learn

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what it is to tramp in the hot sun as others do. To us it is nothing, but to you we know what it will mean. Now, eat these cakes and drink."

"Why feed him, brother?" asked one of the group who stood about. "Let him thirst and starve."

"In time we will treat him so," the first man answered suavely. "In time, friend of my heart. Remember that we have to win a reward, and the conditions were that we should bring him to our master a captive, hale and strong. Let us therefore feed him and give him his fill of water."

To this the others agreed with guttural exclamations, and at once Claude was led up to a fire, beside which he was ordered to sit down. Then his hands were freed, and some flat cakes and a gourd of water placed close beside him. The natives then went apart and squatted upon their hams, eating their own frugal meal. All the while they kept a close watch upon their prisoner, and every time Claude turned towards them, the firelight which was reflected from their eyes showed him clearly that the moment for escape had not yet come. In addition a naked tulwar lying beside each man told that any movement on his part would be dangerous.

"I'll wait," he said to himself. "There is one thing that encourages me, and that is that these fellows will not dare to strike unless they are fearful of their own lives. Their orders are to capture me, and bring me alive to Indoo Khan. No doubt a threat was attached to the command, while a reward was promised if they were successful. Now that they have me in their hands, they will take good care not to risk incurring punishment, while the hope of a substantial sum will keep them wide awake."

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Half an hour later the natives motioned to him to stand up. Then beating the fire out, and securing their prisoner's hands, they set out on their journey, placing Claude in their midst. Soon the party emerged into the open, and by the position of the sun, which was now rising, our hero saw that the course taken was practically a northerly one.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked of the man nearest him.

"Silence! Wait and you shall see," was the curt reply. "We shall arrive at our destination too soon, perhaps, to be pleasant to you."

The ruffian gave a titter which set Claude's pulses dancing. Turning angrily upon the man, he was about to address him, but suddenly recollecting the rôle which he had decided to play, he bent his head upon his breast, and plodded on as if overcome with the terrible prospect before him.

"Ha! our prisoner is less proud than he was a month ago," laughed the man. "The thought of what is before him fills him with such feelings that he is silent while he enjoys them. Let him do so to the full, for I warrant that, however far his imagination goes, there will still be left a means of surprising him. What do you say, brothers?"

"That it were better for him had he never been born; better had he died, remained in Cawnpore, or been drowned in the Ganges!" replied the leader of the party. "Were I this feringhee dog—which, thank the Fates! I am not—I would prefer to be huddled now in the mud, while the river swirled and roared above me. But let us push on. Leave the prisoner to his thoughts, and watch him. He is dispirited and down at heart; but one who dared

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to take the risks that he has taken will still need careful guarding, for there is never any saying what mad idea may come to his mind. Like all of his hated country, he never knows when he is beaten, and never puts aside the hope of safety till the breath is well-nigh out of his body. Move on, I say, and watch him."

With this caution the man strode forward at an even faster pace, Claude being hustled along behind him, till, hampered with the tight sepoy uniform, and scorched by the fierce rays of the sun, he was ready to drop with exhaustion. Indeed it was a wonder that he did not sustain a heat-stroke, for the shako upon his head gave little protection, and as he walked the heat struck full upon his temples, ears, and neck, which were quite unprotected. Had he been other than a strong and healthy young fellow, whose muscles were hardened with constant exercise, and whose vitality had never been impaired, he would have fallen in a faint, and been unable to proceed. But he was a resolute lad, and held on doggedly till, seeing his condition, and fearful that after all they would miss their reward, his captors came to a halt in a tope of trees, and bade him sit down upon the grass.

"Rest," said the leader curtly, "and sleep if you will. We will push on in the evening. To-morrow night we shall reach our destination."

"And by then I hope to have left you," thought Claude.

Consoling himself with this reflection he lay down, and presently closed his eyes. But he did not sleep, nor think of doing so. Instead, he contrived to half-cover his face with one arm, and, thus shielded, looked every now and again at his captors. They, too, had followed his example, except in

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the case of one man, and with the readiness of all Eastern people had fallen into a deep slumber. Two hours passed, and on looking again Claude saw, with a thrill of pleasure, that the man on watch had seated himself with his back against a tree, and that his head had fallen forward upon his breast.

"Now is the time," thought Claude. "There is a stretch of forest half a mile away, and if only I can reach it, and contrive to loosen my wrists, I shall be safe."

He rose cautiously to his feet, and, waiting a moment to assure himself that the man was really asleep, crept silently away. As soon as he had placed the tope of trees between himself and his captors, he took to his heels. Like the wind he flew over the sun-dried earth, and was some hundreds of yards away before his escape was discovered. Then suddenly a shout rent the air, and at once the whole party of natives came rushing from behind the trees, flourishing their tulwars and calling loudly to him to stop.

Claude did not hesitate. Dashing forward, he soon reached the edge of the forest, and dived in amidst the brambles and undergrowth. A hasty glance over his shoulder told him that his pursuers had already gained considerably upon him, and at once realizing that if he was to get clear away he must push on into the very heart of the jungle, he rushed headlong through the tall grass, dashing branches and twigs to one side, absolutely reckless of the thorns which clung to his hands, face, and clothes. A minute later a long trailing creeper caught him by the legs, tripping him up, and throwing him heavily upon his face.

For more than a minute he lay half-stunned upon the ground,

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and when he rose to his feet again it was to find that the natives were close at hand. The leader caught sight of him, and gave a shout of joy. Then, dropping his tulwar—for he still bore in mind the fact that to kill his captive would be to lose the reward and incur the anger of his master,—he sprang upon Claude, and dragged him to the ground.

“Surrender,” he shouted, “dog of a feringhee!”

Claude made no answer, but, roused to anger by his want of success, he clutched at the man with both hands, and though the wrists were bound together, contrived to obtain a firm grip of his throat. The next moment the others were upon him, belabouring him with the hilts of their tulwars. Breathless, bleeding from a score of places where the thorns had torn his flesh, he was dragged away from his opponent, and surrounded once more. But the man who had attacked him lay still upon the ground, and though his companions turned him upon his back, and splashed him with water from a neighbouring jheel, he made no movement. For a minute or two his chest heaved spasmodically, and then even that ceased.

“Dead! You have slain him!” cried one of the natives with an oath, striking Claude fiercely in the face.

“He is gone. You have spoken truly,” the others chimed in, looking at their captive as though they would kill him upon the spot.

“It cannot be helped, my brothers,” said the first, after a long pause. “He is dead surely, and I as second take his place as leader. Come, let us get back. Our grief for our comrade is great, but the thought that our master will avenge the death will comfort us, and besides, the reward will be greater now, since one of us has gone.”

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This view of the case seemed to be agreeable to all, for they turned about without a thought for their dead comrade, and, leaving him there, sought their bivouac again.

"We have had a warning," said the leader when they reached the top of trees once more. "This time we will bind the dog to a trunk. Do so now, for it is still too hot to march. An hour hence we will push on, and by to-morrow evening we should be at Lucknow."

"Then it is there that I am being taken," thought Claude. "I heard that it was almost in a state of siege some three weeks ago, so that it is now probably surrounded by mutineers. My chances of getting away are now very small, and I fear I shall be another of the victims of this rebellion. However, I will not lose heart. Something may turn up to help me at the very last."

An hour later the party set out, and kept the road all night. As the sun was sinking on the following evening they trudged wearily into Lucknow, and, passing amidst the palaces for which the city is famous, arrived at length close to the Residency. That it was in a state of siege was evident, for guns thundered on every side, while from the roofs of houses, from windows, and from behind walls a host of dusky sepoy poured scathing volleys into the defences. Claude listened eagerly, and the answering rattle of musketry fell upon his ears. A shell, too, struck a house close at hand, and shattered its upper part to fragments, killing numbers of mutineers. At once a hoarse British cheer arose, the familiar sound filling our hero with an indescribable longing to be with his countrymen.

He was led to a house which was more lofty than those around, and halting before a door, his guards called loudly for

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it to be opened. "Let us in," shouted the leader. "We have one whom his highness Indoo Khan will welcome."

They were at once admitted, and handing their prisoner over to those in charge of the house, Claude's captors hurried away to tell their master. As for Claude, he was hustled across the room and thrust into a narrow cell. The door jarred to in an instant, and he was left in darkness, and to his own reflections.

CHAPTER XII

A Trying Ordeal

SCARCELY had the prison door closed upon him, and the sound of grating locks and the shooting of rusty bolts ceased, when Claude scrambled to his feet and commenced groping about in the darkness, to discover his surroundings.

"I am caged," he said, "and I am in a desperate situation; I am in the heart of the rebel army, and in the hands of a man who has every reason to detest me. Indeed I seem from the first to have done nothing but thwart him. Reg and I together defeated him when he and half the troops of Row-poor were told off to defend the town. That in itself was sufficient to arouse his anger, for there is nothing of the sportsman about him, and though another might, and probably would, have taken his beating well, Indoo Khan obviously was not a little put out. Then came the discovery of a big conspiracy. It is true that he was never certain that it was we two youngsters who beat his gang of desperadoes off when they attacked us upon the top of that tower. But he suspected us strongly. After that the tiger shoot, in which he gained the utmost discredit. But I suppose the thing that enraged him most was the manner in which we rescued the little Rajah from under his nose, and then wounded himself in the palace. Yes, he has good cause to dislike me, and unless I contrive to escape quickly he will kill me.

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"I'll do my utmost," he said quietly, after thinking the matter over. "If I fail, then I must face this wretch boldly, for though the prospect is a fearful one, I must not forget that I am English. I'll show him that though I am helpless I am still strong enough and sturdy enough to defy him."

Comforting himself with these words, Claude stepped gingerly across the floor till his fingers came in contact with a wall. It was evidently composed of roughly-hewn stone, which was perfectly dry except here and there, where the surface was damp and moss-grown.

"Evidently an underground cell," he said. "I recollect that when entering I was led down a short flight of steps. Now for the roof." Cautiously groping in the darkness, he had little difficulty in reaching the ceiling of his prison, his hands having been lashed together in front of him by his captors to allow him to feed himself. Two feet above his head his fingers struck against another rough surface of stone, and on striking the floor with his heel, he found that the same material was used for its construction. His cell was a tiny place, some twelve feet square; how, then, was it ventilated?

This suggested a possible means of escape, and Claude set to work once more with his fingers. At last he found a small square hole in one corner of the roof, and looking up through it he saw a faint ray of light. But escape by a narrow tube such as this was an impossibility. He also found a few small air-holes in the door, and tried to reconnoitre the approach to his cell through them, but all was dark outside, except where four thin lines of light showed that a door guarded the bottom of the short flight of stairs. Indeed, now that

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he saw it, he remembered passing through it on his way to the cell.

"I'm afraid there is no hope," said Claude, when he had again groped round his prison. "Escape seems impossible. But wait. I'll just see what sounds the walls give out."

A large piece of loose stone had not escaped his notice while he was fumbling about in the dark, and picking this up now he carefully struck the masonry with it. Everywhere the same dull note followed the blow, except at one spot, exactly opposite the door, and there it was hollow, denoting that there was a cavity beyond. Instantly he set to work to discover an entrance to it, but after an hour's fruitless search he was reluctantly compelled to confess that he was beaten.

"If my hands were loose I might attempt to dig out the mortar," he said in desperation. "But even then there would be little chance of success, for I have nothing but fingers to work with. I'm afraid there is no hope for me while I am kept in here. So, as I am dog-tired, I may as well have a sleep. A few hours' rest will set me up and prepare me for hard work again."

With this philosophic decision Claude lay down upon the floor some feet from the door, and close beside that part of the wall which had given out a hollow sound when struck by the stone. A moment later his head was upon the stone, and scarcely had he closed his eyes when his deep breathing told that he was asleep, forgetful for the moment of the desperate situation into which he had fallen.

"The morning has dawned and the time arrived for you to meet his highness," exclaimed a harsh voice some hours after. "Awake, feringhee dog! Here is water and food for you."

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Had I my way you would thirst still longer, and fast till you were weak with hunger. But his highness has strictly ordered that your wants be seen to. Eat then, for I warrant you will require all your strength."

Claude sat up with a start, and looked about him drowsily, blinking his eyes at the light which now streamed into the cell through the open door. The passage outside was now brilliantly illuminated, for the door beyond was also thrown back, revealing a flight of stone stairs which were almost covered with earth, and overgrown with weeds. Then his eyes fell upon a gourd of water and a mat of woven rushes upon which lay some half-burned cakes, and being very hungry he at once fell upon the food.

"Eat, and hasten with your meal," said his jailor, looking at him with some interest. "You are strange people, you sons of Sheitan. Were I in your place, with such a prospect before me, my stomach would sicken at the sight of food and I would have none of it."

"Perhaps not," Claude said to himself. "But there is a belief amongst my countrymen that a man fights better on a full stomach. I am in full agreement with it, and as I mean to fight I'll make the most of this grub. Hillo! What's that?"

The exclamation escaped his lips involuntarily, and he stopped for a moment when in the act of biting one of the cakes; for his eyes had suddenly fallen upon an object which projected from the dirt which thickly covered the floor. It was not two feet from where he lay, and was close to that portion of the wall which had sounded hollow.

"What is it? A ring? A trap-door?" Claude asked him-

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self the questions, while his face flushed and his fingers twitched as a wave of hope rushed through his veins. Then, suddenly recollecting that the jailor's suspicion might be aroused, he turned to the door again and went on with his meal. Meanwhile the man stood beside him, watching him with lynx-like eyes, but failing to perceive the sudden excitement which had almost overcome his prisoner, or the object by which it had been occasioned.

"Come, feringhee," he said more kindly, for he was impressed by Claude's calmness. "His highness waits for you. If you are ready I will call in the guards, and they will release you. That is the order."

"I am almost prepared," replied Claude steadily, repressing with an effort the sudden feeling of fear which chilled him when he thought of the ordeal before him. "But can you not leave me a little longer to myself? I wish to be alone, to think and make ready for this meeting."

"No. It cannot be," the man answered in tones of suspicion. "You have had the hours of darkness in which to meditate. The time has now come for Indoo Khan to speak with you. Above there! Come down and fetch the prisoner."

It was useless to argue, and though Claude would have given all he possessed to be allowed a few minutes to himself with the door of his cell closed, he had to submit with as good a grace as possible, and march from the prison, up the stairs into the street beyond.

"What was that object? Was it indeed the ring attached to a trap-door, a loop-hole through which he might have escaped? Or was it merely the remains of a shackle which had bound some other miserable prisoner to the wall?"

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The thoughts buzzed through Claude's brain, and for a few minutes made him oblivious of all else. Then common sense came to his rescue:

"Whatever it was, the need for it has gone," he said to himself. "It is no use wondering whether it is a trap-door or not, for even if that is the case I cannot use it. I am on my way to face that ruffian, and I must brace myself for the ordeal, for that it is certain to be. I suppose he will order me to be killed."

The prospect was indeed sufficiently grave, but Claude had passed through so many hardships of late, had faced danger and even death so often, that now, when many a man of mature years might have been in the depths of despair and unnerved by the feeling that something terrible was about to befall him, he was able to show such a bold and undaunted front that his guards were amazed.

"The feringhee dog has courage," exclaimed one of them. "Yes, dogs as they are, these white-faces from over sea can still show us how to die. Not once but many times have I seen it during these last few weeks. At Delhi the men defied us when we outnumbered them by hundreds to one. Even their women went to their end with smiles upon their faces. Think, too, of those few who, rather than fall into our hands, lit the powder which lay all about them, and blew themselves and hundreds of our brothers into pieces. And this youth—for he is no more than that—would do as much. I see it in his face. See, his lips are set tight together; he holds his head so high that we might still be servants and he our powerful master. Ah, he has courage indeed!"

"He has," agreed a second eagerly. "I am one of the

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body-guard from Rowpoor, and there this man, Claude sahib as he was in other days—though no white-face shall be sahib longer—outwitted his Highness Indoo Khan on more than one occasion, and on the last, when the soldiers of Rowpoor surrounded him. Yes, this feringhee rescued the Rajah from the palace itself after the troops had risen.”

“Truly that was a bold deed!” was the answer.

“It was,” continued the man, “and I tell it you that you may be warned to have a care. You say that a few at Delhi blew themselves and hundreds of our fellows to atoms when all seemed lost. Then listen to this. Our prisoner has the strength and fierceness to throw you off, and attack his highness when he comes before him. In his desperation he knows no fear. Beware then, for that courage for which you praise him may lead to your own undoing. But hasten with your prisoner. My master is waiting, and if you delay, the street will be filled with the curious, who, seeing that he is one of the hated race, might rush upon him and slay him.”

A crowd of dusky sepoy and scantily-clad natives had collected in the street meanwhile, and though Claude and his guards had paused for little more than a minute, it had increased to large proportions. As the man who had last spoken had hinted, it was possible that the onlookers, with their passions aroused by the sight of a European, might attack the feringhee there and then, and vent their wrath upon him. Accordingly, closing round their prisoner, the guards hurried along, some two hundred sepoy following, shouting threats at the Englishman, and filling the air with exultant cries. A minute later, however, the majority had disappeared, with howls of terror, for there were watchful

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eyes in the besieged Residency, and these, observing a gathering of the enemy, cleverly planted a shell in their very midst. So close, indeed, did the missile explode to Claude and his guards that they were almost stunned by the concussion, and were thrown to the ground.

"Up, and let us run away from this place," cried the man who had been one of the body-guard at Rowpoor. "Now, hold the prisoner, and forward."

Grasping Claude by the arms, the sepoys hurried him along the street and soon reached a wide doorway, through which they turned into a courtyard. Having halted here to remove his bonds, they crossed the yard and entered beneath an archway of carved stone which was supported by pillars of the same material, and of handsome design. Indeed, occupied as Claude's thoughts were with the prospect before him, his eye did not fail to notice, nor his mind to take interest in his surroundings.

"This is evidently the courtyard of one of the palaces for which Lucknow is famous," he said to himself. "And now it is filled with bloodthirsty sepoys!"

"The carving catches your eye, feringhee dog!" cried one of his guards, pointing to the archway with his tulwar. "This is the house of a chief of ours, who was mighty before your countrymen invaded our land. He died many years ago, but his descendants will reign here again when all your comrades are killed. Meanwhile his highness, Indoo Khan, Rajah of Rowpoor by the election of the people, occupies it. When you are above I will show you something even better."

With a nod to his fellows, and a malicious grin, the fellow clasped Claude's arm still more firmly and pushed him towards

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a broad staircase of stone. And here again arches, ceilings, and walls were composed of soft white stone, which had been carved and frescoed elaborately. A pair of motionless elephants guarded the foot, while the massive wooden balusters which passed to the summit on either side rested upon images of tigers, so faithful to nature, and so exquisitely fashioned that had they but possessed the proper colouring they would have appeared to be alive. Arrived at the top of the stairs, the guards traversed a stone-flagged landing of huge size, and mounting another flight of stairs emerged upon a wide balcony which overhung the streets below, and was provided with a roof of masonry carved and chased all over its white surface.

"We will take the prisoner to the rail and let him look upon the scene I spoke of," said the sepoy who had last spoken. "Now, dog of a white man," he went on, dragging Claude to the coping which defended the edge of the balcony, and forcing him to look over, "what meets your eye below? Does the position of your comrades rejoice your heart, or do you think that danger threatens them?"

Claude looked long and earnestly, and took in every particular of the scene below him. To right and left houses of every description and size, from the tumble-down hovel of the bheesty to the palaces of native princes, met his gaze, cropping up in irregular order, forming narrow tortuous streets, which reached almost to the banks of a flowing river.

"The Ghoomtee!" said Claude, "and there is the iron bridge which carries the road across it. What is the ruin that stands near?"

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"It is the remainder of the Muchee Bhowan," replied the man. "The feringhees occupied it at first, but a day or two after we attacked them they retreated from it, and fired a magazine beneath it. Look how they are hemmed in on every side."

He leant over the parapet and eagerly stretched forth his hand, tracing the lines of the British defences with his finger. Had Claude been gazing at a map of large dimensions he could not have taken in the various points so clearly as now, for the balcony upon which he stood appeared to be within easy gunshot of the Residency, and towered so much above it that the intervening distance seemed to be dwarfed into insignificance, and the balcony actually to overhang the besieged garrison.

"Would we were as close as it appears," said the sepoy with a fiendish grin. "If only less distance separated us, our sharpshooters could lie here in comfort and pick off your people as easily as a fowler brings down his bag of birds. But you have not answered my question, feringhee. How does the position of your countrymen please you?"

"Wait and I will tell you," Claude replied. Then leaning still farther over he traced the outline of the defences.

Running parallel with the river was a low rampart, strengthened here and there by sand-bags, and having a ditch in front. The western face was composed of a series of houses connected by entrenchments, while on the two remaining sides the defences were completed by various buildings, many of which, owing to the desperate manner in which their garrisons beat off the attacks of the enemy, have become historical. Amongst them were the Bailey Guard, Dr. Fayer's house, Anderson's house, and that of Mr. Gubbins. These were connected by walls of earth and by batteries, while in the centre

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other batteries were posted, so as to command the outer works, and form an inner line of defence in case of need. Outside Claude noticed that many buildings which would have commanded the Residency had been levelled, a precautionary measure taken by Sir Henry Lawrence, who had been in command at first, but who, unhappily, succumbed a day or two after the commencement of the siege to a shell wound, leaving Brigadier Inglis in charge.

But what attracted Claude's attention more than all, were the numerous crouching figures to be seen on every house, and behind every wall. Every now and again one moved or darted across an open space to disappear a moment later. And all the while guns thundered from the batteries, while a dropping fusillade was directed from every side.

And from batteries masked between the houses, and from the roofs, a huge force of sepoy could be seen engaged in pouring an exceedingly heavy fire upon the defences. No wonder the man who had asked Claude the question curled his lip in disdain and looked triumphantly at his fellows.

"Come, feringhee," he repeated. "How goes the fighting, I ask?"

"Tell me how many rebels are there?" said Claude, turning proudly upon him.

"Rebels? Take care," the man cried harshly. "We are not rebels! We are patriots fighting for our own."

"I will not argue with you," Claude replied calmly, "though to my mind there are few who are not rebels, and worse. But you have not told me the numbers."

"Perhaps thirty thousand," answered the sepoy. "Perhaps three times that number."

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"And how many of my countrymen?"

"Less than two thousand, including the women and children, and men of our race who have been foolish enough to remain with the feringhees. At least, that is the number reported."

"Are they well provided with food and with ammunition?" asked Claude.

"It is said so. For a month stores poured into the Residency."

"Then my countrymen will give you trouble," said Claude steadily. "Though the odds are enormous, they will keep out the rebels."

"Bah! You are as proud as ever," cried the sepoy angrily. "When I brought you here I thought to lower your pride, to let you see that your comrades, like you, are doomed. But you and all your race are alike. Nothing but death can persuade you."

With an impatient stamp the man hurried Claude through a door which gave admission to an isolated portion of the balcony, where a number of sepoys were collected. As the prisoner approached they opened out, and a minute later Claude found himself in their midst, facing a carved Indian chair which stood against the wall. Seated upon this was Indoo Khan, the rebel general of Rowpoor, and now a Rajah.

As Claude and his guards came to a halt before him, Indoo Khan raised his head and looked searchingly at his prisoner, who, favouring him for one moment with a disdainful nod of recognition, turned his eyes to the company of sepoys who stood about.

The majority were armed with muskets and tulwars, while

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a few, whose faces were familiar, bore only tulwars and pistols. They had once been body-guard to Icktaboo Sing, the rightful leader of Rowpoor, but had now transferred their allegiance to Indoo Khan. Opposite them were some dozen natives dressed only in loin-clothes and turbans, while in their midst was a wild-looking figure, who crouched upon the floor and held his skinny fingers over a brazier, as if, indeed, he needed warmth on this, one of the most stifling days of India.

With a scarcely repressed start of dismay Claude recognized him as the fakir who had spoken to the conspirators when assembled in the watch-tower at Rowpoor, and who had been discovered by Reg and himself. Then his feelings received another shock; protruding from the brazier were some iron implements which could be intended for one purpose alone.

"Our friend and his brazier interest you, Claude sahib," said Indoo Khan suavely, noticing the direction in which his prisoner looked. "Let him see that the irons are hot then. It will whet his appetite for what is to come."

At his words the faces of the onlookers broke into smiles of anticipation, while the glittering and cruel-looking eyes stared hard at Claude.

"Yes, let him look if he will," croaked the fakir with a giggle. "The servant of Siva is here to do his bidding. Behold, feringhee dog, here is one of my playthings."

Stretching forth a skinny hand he plucked one of the irons from the brazier, and held the white-hot, glowing end presented at the prisoner. "See, it burns fiercely," he said. "The handle even is so hot that I can scarce hold it."

Strive as he would to maintain an unmoved demeanour,

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Claude found it impossible to hide entirely the fear with which this sight filled him. His face went deadly pale, his lips twitched, and for the moment he felt as though his strength would give way under the ordeal, and he would faint. Then, suddenly, the recollection that he was alone, that a number of native rebels surrounded him, and watched eagerly to see their prisoner quail, came to him with all its force, and in a moment he was himself again. Straightening his limbs, and closing his lips firmly, he turned from the fakir and his horrible implements to Indoo Khan, and looked him boldly in the face.

“What do you want with me?” he said, using the native language. “I have not come here to be shown the tricks of this man, tricks which at another time might have amused me. Kill me now, for that I know well is your intention.”

For a minute the rebel general was too disconcerted to speak. He had expected his prisoner to cry out with terror, to tremble at the sight of the fakir and his instruments. Indeed, leaning forward in his gilded chair, he had watched eagerly and with savage anticipation to see the lad who had so often worsted him fall upon his knees and beg for mercy. But what had happened? Instead of cringing, the young Englishman had boldly answered his gibes by requesting to be slain. Indoo Khan was dumfounded, but, recovering his composure at length, he turned upon his prisoner angrily, and was about to order instant torture, when an unlooked-for incident occurred to distract his attention. Of a sudden, and with startling loudness, the halting cannonade that went on unceasingly below, and the patter of musketry, suddenly surged into a roar of crashing artillery, while shrieks and

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hoarse native shouts filled the air. Then a sepoy came running along the balcony, and, bursting without ceremony into the group which surrounded Indoo Khan, exclaimed: "The feringhee dogs are upon us! They are attacking our batteries in force. The orders are: 'Every man to his post to repel the assault' "

CHAPTER XIII

Amongst the Powder-Barrels

THE feringhees attacking our batteries!" cried Indoo Khan in alarm, springing from his chair. "The orders are: 'Each man to his post to repel the assault!' Then our prisoner must wait. We will deal with him later. Take him back to his prison and fasten him there. We will give him time to think over this interview, to dream of our friend and his brazier. Now, guards, hurry him away, and let the others join their comrades. I will go to the head of our troops, and we will see whether we cannot capture these impudent people who have attacked us."

At his words the group of natives who had surrounded him separated, and departed at a run, while the guards, closing round their prisoner, grasped him by the arms and hurried him away.

"Quick!" cried their leader. "Back to the cell with him, here is a chance that must not be missed. The enemy have made a sortie, and we must punish them. Each of us wishes to have a hand in the matter."

For a moment Claude had scarcely been able to believe his ears, but now, awaking as if from a dream, and fully understanding the value of this reprieve to him, he ran at his fastest pace, so that there might be no delay in getting back

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to his prison. Down the long staircases they rushed at such speed that a false step on the part of one would have brought all tumbling in a heap to the bottom. Then they raced across the courtyard, and into the street.

It was filled with running natives, and mingling with these, and bending low to avoid the hail of bullets which the defenders of the Residency poured upon the crowd, the party were not long in reaching the door for which they aimed. To throw it open and dart down the steps was the work of an instant only, and less than a minute had passed before Claude found himself back in his cell, with the crash and roar of cannon and musketry almost drowned by the banging of the door. Immediately the lock was shot to with its familiar grating sound, while the bolts rasped along their grooves into position. Then the dull patter of retreating feet reached his ears, the outside door closed with a jar, and he was left, in darkness, listening to the low rumble of the guns.

"Now for the ring," he said. "This is a chance in a hundred, for if our good fellows had not attacked just now I should be writhing before Indoo Khan. It almost seems as though the besieged knew of my position, and acted now on my behalf."

Darting across the floor he threw himself upon the ground, and now that his hands were free, groped rapidly in all directions.

"Ah! The ring!" he gasped, as his fingers came in contact with the projection which had caught his eye. "Is it a ring? Yes. Then is there a trap-door?"

Though he dug his fingers into the earth which covered the floor he could come to no decision, and even when, with the

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aid of his boot, he had swept the earth aside, he was still uncertain. Then, in desperation, he grasped the ring and pulled with all his might, pulled till the perspiration rolled from his forehead and his heart threatened to burst.

Suddenly, as if the force brought to bear upon the ring had overcome the work of years of damp and neglect, something gave a little, the ring moved upwards, and then fell back, dragged into its former position by a large slab of stone.

"A trap-door! I felt certain of it," said Claude, overjoyed by his success. "Now for it again!"

Poising himself well above the slab, the edges of which he could now clearly distinguish with his fingers, he paused to take a deep breath. Then, once more grasping the ring, he heaved with all his might. It gave, the stone moved upon one end, and opened some few inches. Claude was quite prepared to take advantage of even this success, for with a gentle movement of his toe he slid the heel of one of his boots into the opening. A kick relieved him of the other boot, and it, too, found a place in the opposite crack.

"Now, a breather, and then to work again," he said, sitting down to rest for a moment.

Rising to his feet once more, he grasped the opposite edge of the slab with both hands, and finding that this gave him an advantage when compared with the ring, put even more strength into the struggle. For a moment or two the stone seemed to be wedged, so firmly did it resist his efforts, but then a sudden movement freed it, and it came back quite easily. Claude drew it over till it leant against the wall, ready to be dropped into its former position.

"Now I must see where it leads to!" he said, elated by his

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success. "It will be dangerous to delay, as one of those fellows may return at any moment. So I'll leave at once. I wonder whether there is a big drop beneath? I shall have to go cautiously, for to fall and break a limb now would be terrible."

He waited to assure himself that the conflict still raged overhead, then, dropping on to his knees, he crept to the aperture, and, grasping the edges firmly, lowered his legs into the hole.

Bang! What was that? His boot had struck sharply against something which had given out a metallic sound. Bang! There it was again.

Thrusting his foot firmly down, he found that the object was a kind of rung, composed of iron, and let into the masonry on either side. There was a second beneath it, and others lower down again, so that Claude had no difficulty in descending. When he reached the bottom he groped his way forward, till, turning a corner, he halted abruptly, his eyes riveted upon a distant spot of light.

"A lamp! What can it mean?" Claude asked himself. "I'll wait here to see if anyone moves, and if not I'll go boldly forward. It is more than likely that whoever lit that lamp hastened away when the alarm was given."

Five minutes passed, and as he saw no sign of any mutineer near the light, and heard no sound save the dull boom of cannon and the occasional noise of cheering, which came to this subterranean spot just as a faint, far-away murmur, Claude emerged from the narrow passage which led from his prison, and crept stealthily forward. Soon he was close to the light, which consisted of a native lamp with hanging

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wick, from which a smoking yellow flame spluttered. Feeble though the rays were, they served to banish the darkness immediately surrounding the lamp, and enabled Claude to gain some idea of his position, and the use to which this strange underground passage was put.

“A magazine!” he murmured, lifting the light and surveying rows upon rows of piled-up barrels. “I wonder what this place really is. The masonry is old and discoloured, and the mortar is soft and rotten. I should not be surprised if this was really the cellar of one of the many palaces which once stood, or now exist, in Lucknow. No doubt the mutineers came across it, and found that it would make an excellent store for their ammunition. They cannot possibly be aware of the entrance from my cell, and must have some larger and more convenient one, as they have been able to bring all these barrels here. If I leave that trap-door open, the first native who comes for the feringhee prisoner will instantly discover how I have escaped. There will then be a hue and cry, and in due time the trap will be lit upon. But the interval will have been sufficiently long to enable me to escape, and naturally they will imagine that I have made for the main entrance, for they will recollect that I am disguised as a sepoy. Let me think. Would that be my best plan or not?”

Placing the lamp upon a barrel, he sat upon a second, and sinking his face into his hands, thought the matter out. He had decided on a plan, and was about to put it to the test, when the sound of heavy breathing startled him. Then someone in the distance, whom he heard running towards him at a rapid pace, struck against some object, and came tumbling to the ground.

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"Ah! my shin!" he heard the native exclaim, giving vent to many an angry oath. "That is the evil of running in a pit which is as dark and darker than night. Steady there, my comrades. Wait till we are round the corner, and then the lamp which we left will guide us. The more haste just now the less speed, as I have shown you."

For the moment Claude was so startled that he could not move from the spot, but sat there listening intently. So acute, indeed, was his hearing that he could actually hear the man vigorously rubbing his damaged shin, and the expressions of pain and annoyance which he still uttered beneath his breath. Then, realizing that to remain where he was a moment longer would be to risk almost certain discovery, he fled from the light in the opposite direction, and finding a dark cleft between two rows of powder-barrels, dived into it with all haste. A minute later, as he peeped from behind one of the casks, half a dozen natives came into view, and halted near the lamp.

"The feringhees are attacking so strongly, and our guns are so fiercely engaged, that more powder is urgently required," said the man who had come to grief a few moments before. "Take care now, all of you; the dropping of one of these casks here, when the light is near, might hoist thousands of our comrades into the air, in addition to killing us. Besides, the loss of this ammunition would be a serious blow to our cause, while the destruction of the old palace above would remove one of our finest positions, for from its windows we command the defences. Have a care, then, I give you warning, and two of you take one barrel between you. There, my brother here and I will lead the way."

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Gabbling out the sentences, while he stooped once more to rub his shin, the man now took hold of one of the barrels, and, aided by a second native, lifted it from the pile. Then, turning, they went away into the darkness, bending beneath their burden. The remainder followed the example of their leader, and soon Claude was left alone as before.

Scarcely had the last disappeared in the darkness when he crept from his hiding-place, and on all-fours followed in their wake.

"They are making for the main exit from these vaults," he said to himself, "and by following them I shall learn its whereabouts far sooner and with less risk of capture than I should if I searched alone. Ah! I can see a streak of daylight in the distance, and there are the first two carrying their barrel up a flight of steps."

By this time he had rounded a corner, and passing between two rows of cases, which probably contained ball-cartridge, halted some twenty yards from the exit, while he watched the last of the mutineers depart. A few seconds later he was at the foot of the steps, and creeping cautiously up them looked out, to find that he was in a narrow courtyard, surrounded by very high walls, and with a small gateway exactly opposite, which led straight into the street. He darted across the open space, then as quickly returned to the vault.

"No escape for me in that direction," he murmured; "the gate opens almost opposite to Indoo Khan's quarters. Still, it might be done at night, though how I am to make my way from there to the Residency is more than I can guess. At present I must remain below, and my first business must be to discover a safe hiding-place, and then to close

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the trap which leads to the cell. No, I had better do that at once."

Carefully making his way between the rows of cases, it was not long before Claude again came in sight of the flickering lamp, which, left as it was upon one of the powder-barrels, seemed to threaten an explosion at any moment! A little consideration soon directed his steps to the tiny passage which led to his cell, and passing quickly along it he climbed up the iron rungs. Once more he was in his prison, to find it silent, cold, and desolate as before. But what a difference there was in his own spirits!

"It makes me smile," he murmured as he stood in the darkness. "A few hours ago I was just like a mouse in a trap, perhaps in a worse predicament; for whereas in the case of the mouse a quick and almost painless death usually follows, I knew full well that I could expect nothing from the hands of the rebel Indoo Khan but torture, for we all know that that is the manner in which all their captives have been treated. But I must not delay."

Sliding into the aperture, he planted his feet firmly upon one of the rungs, and lowered the slab of stone into its proper position. Then he again went to the main entrance to the vault, and finding no one about, returned and commenced to explore the magazine. Lifting the lamp, he carried it held high above his head, and trudged along beside the piled-up barrels. They formed a complete circle round the wall, except at three points, one through which the main entrance led, a second to the cell, and the third on the opposite side. In the centre was a large open space, rimmed by the powder, and beyond that by a circle of solid masonry.

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"It is evident that this is the chief part of the magazine," said Claude. "I suppose there must be some hundreds of barrels here, while cartridge-cases line the entrance. Then where does the third passage lead to? Perhaps there is another exit there, through which I could escape."

Replacing the lamp, he crept into the opening between the barrels, and soon found himself in a gallery, along which a single row of casks were stored. Beyond these the passage narrowed, and some yards farther on there was a low wall of piled-up stones. Here the glimmer of another light caught his eye, and searching carefully with his hands he found a second lamp, burning dimly, and concealed in a narrow cupboard which had once been an ammunition-case. "What does this mean?" he asked himself in astonishment.

"And here are muskets and pistols. They and the barricade combined make it appear that an attack was feared in this direction. Perhaps the passage leads on towards the Residency. Luck has suddenly come to my side, and, now that I have had such a wonderful escape from my cell, may lead me back to my friends. This pistol is loaded at any rate. I'll take it with me."

By now Claude was almost bewildered with the strangeness of his surroundings. At the most he had hoped to escape from his cell, and from that moment expected to have to fight his way to the open. One exit, indeed, he had found, but until darkness fell it was impracticable, and even then to make use of it would be a hazardous undertaking. And now he had come across another possible means of escape. Where did this gallery lead to? To safety?

To answer the question then was impossible, so, taking the

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precaution to remove the caps from the weapons lying at his feet, and thrusting one pistol into his breast, he lifted the lamp and, passing over the barricade, set forward upon a journey of discovery. Twisting and turning, descending at times till he was forced to splash through pools of stagnant water, and then ascending again, the passage appeared to lead on interminably. To Claude in his highly-strung condition it seemed as though he had crawled a mile at least, whereas, in reality, barely a hundred yards separated him from the vault in which the magazine was placed. At last, when his patience was almost exhausted, a ray of sunlight fell dimly upon his eye, and hurrying forward he found himself gazing upward at a circular opening, while at his feet a deep pit descended, from which a moment or two later the dull splash of debris tumbling into water fell upon his ears. Involuntarily he drew back, and lying flat upon the ground stared up at the opening.

"Another foot and I should have gone over!" he exclaimed with a shudder. "It's deep, too, as I could tell from the sound. Just fancy the passage ending in a well from which, no doubt, hundreds have drawn water without suspecting the presence of such a place. Yes, I can see the windlass above, but how the crafty people who designed this secret tunnel managed to climb out of it is more than I can say. Possibly they were dragged up by ropes, but I cannot manage it in that way, for the winch is fully wound up. It's hard luck, but I must not grumble, for I have the other opening to fall back upon. Hillo!"

The exclamation was accompanied by a long-drawn-out whistle of surprise and excitement. Claude's watchful eye

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had caught sight of something projecting from the masonry close at hand. There it was again higher up, and again, one above the other, dull-coloured, rusty hoops of iron.

"A ladder!" he cried excitedly. "Steady though! Supposing the rust has eaten the rungs through, I should go plump into the water below! Ugh!"

The prospect, indeed, was enough to make anyone shudder, and for the moment it kept Claude crouching upon the floor, hesitating to take this further risk. Then, remembering his position, and that at any moment a host of mutineers might come in pursuit of him, he rose to his knees, grasped one of the hoops, and tugged with all his might.

"It bears!" he cried joyfully. "And so does the next! Here goes for the opening!"

Clambering slowly upward, it was a minute or more later before he ventured to thrust his head above the broken coping of the well, and when he did he took the precaution to have the supporting-post of the windlass between himself and the position occupied by the mutineers. He could have given a shout, so great was his joy and relief, for there, not more than sixty yards away, was the British Residency, the well being at the angle where the eastern wall joined with the northern, the latter running parallel with the river.

"Nothing could be luckier!" he said in delight. "Of course I cannot venture across the open space now, for were I to do so I should draw the fire of besiegers and besieged alike. Had I been here half an hour ago I might have taken the risk, for then the British were making a sortie. But it is too late now, unless the mutineers follow me along the passage. In that case I shall chance it. Any-

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thing will be better than falling into their hands again. Wait, though, I fancy I know of a dodge by which I can beat them."

His brow contracted, and he stood there clinging to the rungs, hardly noticing the crash of distant cannon, and the swish of bullets which hurtled overhead, for a daring plan had suddenly occurred to him.

"I'll do it," he said with determination. "If they track me down here I'll blow them all sky-high."

Clambering down the well as rapidly as he could, he picked up the lamp, and hastened back along the passage. When he judged that he was approaching the barricade, he placed the lamp in a hollow, and crawling forward lay upon his face, and listened intently to assure himself that no one was there. Ten minutes later the light was back in its dark cupboard, and Claude was in the main portion of the vault once more. Selecting a barrel he carried it along to the barricade, and set it down gingerly.

"One of these stones will help to break it open," he said breathlessly. "Then I'll fill my cap, and start by laying a broad train from this point in the direction of the well. When that is done I'll take it the other way. By arranging it in that order I can make use of the lamp with little fear of an explosion, for so long as the powder is not connected with the barrels the train will simply flare up without doing any harm should it become accidentally fired. Once it is complete I'll knock in the heads of a few barrels, sprinkle the powder about, and cut along into the passage. That can be done without the aid of the light. When all is ready I'll creep into the tunnel well beyond the barricade, and if those demons

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insist on following me, will fire this pistol into the train. Ha! ha! ha! we'll see who is to have the best of this trouble."

His spirits, elated by the success which had already favoured him, became so buoyant that he could have shouted for joy. But there was work to be done.

"I've no time to dawdle," he said sternly. "Once the job is completed it will be wise for these natives to leave me alone."

Taking a stone from the barricade he battered in the head of the powder-cask, and bearing the lamp gingerly, and at arm's length, set about the task he had undertaken. A quarter of an hour sufficed to finish it to his satisfaction, and then, replacing the spluttering lamp in its cupboard, he retired down the tunnel. Two hours passed in comparative silence, broken only by the dull thunder of artillery; and just as he was wondering whether the night would come without his flight being discovered, a distant shout attracted his attention, setting his heart thumping against his ribs with excitement.

"At last," he gasped, clutching his pistol. "From here I shall just be able to see the barricade when the lamp is produced, and if those fellows attempt to cross it—well, the explosion will certainly kill them. Indeed, it is doubtful how matters will go with me."

Once more the shout came rushing along the gallery, and was followed by others. Then, in the space of a few minutes, the central space in the magazine was filled with frantic sepoys.

"Silence all!" called out a voice loudly. "Silence, I say, and let us work together to capture the feringhee. Say there, where does the trap lead which you in your carelessness failed to discover?"

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"Wait! Would you have me break my neck by falling into this dark pit?" came back the answer in low and muffled tones, as if the words were hemmed in by the masonry. "One minute and I will tell you, but not for his highness himself will I descend till a lamp is brought. Ah, here it is! Lower it, man, so that I may look below."

It was evident that the man who shouted the words from Claude's prison did not like the task allotted to him.

"There, hold the light lower!" he was heard to cry faintly. "Perhaps the feringhee dog is below, and if so do you think I am idiot enough to descend and take him single-handed? I should deserve my fate indeed were I so lacking in caution."

At length, however, it was clear that he had mastered his fears, for his voice came suddenly full and strong, reverberating through the vault and along the passage beyond.

"He is not here," he shouted, rounding the angle and coming into full view of the lamp which spluttered in the magazine. "The trap leads down to a tunnel, which I have just passed through. He has escaped us. Search for him amongst the barrels."

"Yes, search high and low for the feringhee," reiterated the man who seemed to be in command. "No doubt he is hidden in some corner."

With senses strained to the highest pitch, Claude listened to the tumbling of barrels and the patter of distant feet. Then again the leader's voice fell upon his ears.

"He is not here, the feringhee dog," the man shouted wrathfully. "Search for him. Some of you return by the way we came; it is more than likely he has passed into the streets. Others of you go down this passage to the barricade."

Amongst the Powder-Barrels

As Claude heard the words his heart seemed suddenly to stop, so great was the strain. Then, bracing himself for that which seemed inevitable, he knelt upon the floor, grasping the pistol with one hand, with the muzzle thrust into the broad train of powder. And in this position he waited, prepared to press the trigger and then dart away towards the well in search of safety. One gentle pull, the pressure of a single finger, and all in the magazine, and all who happened to be above, would be hurled into eternity, while the city, with its hordes of mutineers hurling shot and shell upon the besieged Residency, would quake and tremble to its very foundations.

Claude realized it all, fully understood what that pistol-shot would mean. But undeterred by the thought—for he well knew that the action would be justified—he knelt there, calm and collected now that the moment for action had come, his eyes endeavouring to pierce the gloom which hid the barricade.

“Here is the wall we built,” he heard someone say, “and here is the lamp and our weapons just as we left them.”

“What of that?” asked another native harshly. “He has gone on. Climb over and follow.”

“Nay, he has not passed this way,” said the first hesitatingly. “Push on yourself if you will. For me, I would not venture a foot beyond the wall; none know the dangers that are there.”

He shivered and retreated hastily, for the native of India has no greater liking for ghostly subterranean passages than has the average European.

“Yes, none know the way,” chimed in another eagerly. “Let us turn back. Now that I think the matter over, I

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believe I saw a man like this feringhee gliding down the street after the British attack. It must have been the prisoner."

"Dressed in the torn and mud-stained uniform of a sepoy, did you say?"

"Yes, that was so," the man replied. "It is useless to push on."

"Are you sure?" asked the man who had first urged them forward, now hesitating himself at the unpleasant prospect of exploring the gallery.

"Have I not said so?" was the curt answer. "Can I not believe my eyes?"

"Then let us return. Quick, or he will escape us."

All turned about and hurried away. Then Claude heard voices in altercation, and after that, with a shout of "The feringhee has fled this way. After the dog!" the pursuers rushed from the vault, leaving him in sole possession.

CHAPTER XIV

Safe in Lucknow

WEARILY did the time pass by. Minutes dragged along until a full hour was completed, and still Claude remained undisturbed. Crouching in the darkness, within a few inches of a thick band of black dots, which, had there been light enough, would have been seen trailing zigzag across the floor, curling this way and that, and passing unbroken into the distance, he waited with what patience he could command, at one moment his hopes of escape raised to the highest, and at another almost swept away by a distant shout, as if some one of the mutineers were leading his comrades back into the magazine in search of the runaway.

“They will suffer far more than I,” he murmured. “If they discover me the power is in my hands to inflict terrible punishment upon them, and I shall not hesitate for a moment. In deed I feel that under any circumstances I ought to fire the train, and only the fear that the explosion would bring death to myself deters me. Had I but a fuse with which to start it, it would be a different matter; then, I warrant, the mutineers would receive a crushing blow to-night. They deserve it, for they have treated their prisoners with ferocity and have spared none, not even the helpless women and children.”

Steeling himself for possible action by these words, he waited

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and listened. At length, however, the sultry air, the long struggle, and the strain of all that had passed told upon him, and, in spite of all his efforts, his head nodded, and then sank upon his right arm; then the eyes closed, opened as if with one last effort, and came together again, while his breathing became deep and regular. How long his sleep lasted he never knew, probably little more than an hour; but when he awoke, which he did with a start, it was at the sound of distant voices.

"He has gone, and I thank the fates that it was not through my carelessness," someone was saying in the native language. "I would give the palace above and all the wealth it once contained, were they mine, to escape from the punishment of those to whom the feringhee prisoner was entrusted. His Highness, Indoo Khan, Rajah of Rowpoor, is not a man whom it is well to anger. His followers walk in hourly fear of him, and if they dared would hasten back to their city, back, too, to their old ruler if that were possible, but for the fact that an attempt to do so would end in disaster. Heigh-ho! The heavy air of this vault makes one sleepy."

"Then you can lie down and rest yourself," another voice answered. "Of all the posts allotted to us, there is none that I love more than this at the barricade. If the air is stuffy, it is cool at least, and as no trouble need be expected, one can rest in peace. Here we are. Now place the lamp so, and lie down in the shadow. The hunt after our prisoner has tired me also, and besides, we are all fatigued after the fighting to-day. Those feringhees attack as if success were certain, and as if they knew no fear. Our losses must have been heavy to-day."

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"They were," his companion responded drowsily. "But what does it matter? We are so many, while the enemy are so few. A thousand more or less make no difference to us, while all our brothers realize that death in such a cause is really a reward."

Claude was relieved to find that the two natives intended coming no farther than the barricade. There was therefore no occasion for him to fire the train, and instead he watched eagerly as one of the men withdrew the spluttering lamp from its cupboard, and having roughly trimmed the wick with his fingers, and replenished the reservoir of oil from a gourd which stood near by, placed the light on the top of the wall. Then he stretched his arms as high as the tunnel would permit, and yawned loudly, casting a long and weird shadow upon the wall as he stood in the dancing rays. A minute or two later both had thrown themselves upon the ground behind the barricade, and Claude found himself again to all intents and purposes alone.

"Just fancy my going to sleep!" he thought in vexation. "It gave me quite a start when I awoke to hear those voices. It was foolish of me, and might well have ended in disaster. However, here I am, as secure as before. I wonder how the time goes? I'll wait a couple of hours longer, and then creep away."

Accordingly, taking good care to keep fully awake, he lay still until he judged that two hours had passed. Then he crept stealthily away, and in due course arrived at the edge of the well. But now he was glad to find that the circle of bright sunlight above had given place to one of darkness, through which numerous stars were to be seen. Night had

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fallen, and quick to take advantage of the fact Claude felt for the iron ladder, hoisted himself to the coping above, and having waited there to ascertain that all was quiet in the vicinity, scrambled over the edge.

"Now for the Residency," he said in a whisper. "At last I feel as though safety were in sight."

Turning his face towards the besieged Residency, and going upon all-fours in case his figure should show up against some distant light, he crawled slowly forward. He had traversed perhaps a dozen or more yards when a stone moved upon his left.

"What was that?" he asked himself as he crouched to the ground. "Someone is moving over there."

"Hist, who is that? Who follows me?" asked someone in Hindustani, whispering the words. "Silence, fool, or we shall be discovered. Are you, like myself, bent upon entering the trenches alone and slaying one of the feringhees? It is a grand death to seek; but—hist—creep more silently, or else the bullets of the enemy will slay us ere we reach the walls."

"It must be a fanatic," thought Claude. "A few tried the same game at Cawnpore, and we had to be extremely watchful. Why, the fellow is crawling towards me. Perhaps he suspects that I am an enemy."

"Who are you? Why do you follow me?" the man asked in low but angry tones, halting close beside Claude. "Lie still, or return at once, for otherwise you will ruin my hopes."

Claude did not answer, but levelling his pistol at the dark figure which had drawn up beside him, pressed the trigger

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firmlly. Instantly a flash lit up the scene, while a piercing shriek almost drowned the report of the weapon. Then someone challenged directly in front, and almost instantly a storm of musketry was poured into the darkness from the English defences.

Lying prone upon the ground, Claude escaped the bullets of his friends by a miracle. For five minutes he listened while the fusillade, spreading like a flame, encircled the British lines, and was responded to from every side, from house-top and balcony. Then the firing died down suddenly, and he crept forward again until a long black shadow stood up before him.

"Don't shoot," he called out, "over there. I'm British. Hold your fire or you will kill a friend."

"Who's that? Halt or I fire!" came the answer promptly. "Hold your weapons ready there, my men, and blow this fellow to pieces if necessary. Now, who are you?"

"I'm a refugee from Cawnpore," called Claude faintly, almost overcome by excitement. "I've just escaped from the mutineers. For goodness' sake let me in."

"He's English," he heard the same voice cry out. "Stand ready, lads, to hoist him up. Now, come close to the wall."

Starting to his feet, Claude dashed forward, and as soon as he reached the wall he was grasped by unseen hands and dragged within the lines. Then he was hurried into a neighbouring building, a lantern was produced and thrust eagerly towards his face, while a perfect storm of questions was poured upon him.

"He's a sepoy. Look at his uniform," shouted one of the by-standers.

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"Sepoy! So are you," exclaimed another. "Look at his face. That belongs to a Britisher."

"Stand aside, my men, and let me question him," said the officer who had first answered Claude's question. "Now, my lad, who are you?"

Vainly did our hero endeavour to answer. Bravely did he bite his lips and strive to hide their trembling. But he was overcome by this sudden release from the anxiety through which he had recently passed. Great though the strain had been he had borne it nobly, but it was as nothing to the fierce flood of joy which now surged through his veins. His head was dizzy, a mist swam before his eyes, the single lantern appeared as twenty, while the by-standers were huddled together in a huge, confusing group. His knees suddenly bent beneath him, and, stretching out his hands as if to find some support, he fell to the ground as unconscious as the huddled figure which he had left close beside the well.

"There, your escape has been too much for you, and no doubt you were weary with struggling and with anxiety, and famishing, too, perhaps," said a kindly voice in his ear. "Come, sit up and drink this off. It will put new life into you. Bring that fan a little closer, Reynolds, and move it more briskly if you can, for the night is sultry, and the heat tells upon the poor lad."

It was the same officer who had responded to Claude's challenge, and who had first accosted him when he got within the defences. "Come," he repeated encouragingly. "Pull yourself together."

The words were quite sufficient to stimulate our hero,

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indeed they acted with more force perhaps than did the strong spirit which had just been poured down his throat.

"Why, I am a baby!" he exclaimed with some amount of chagrin, sitting up to rub his eyes and look about him in bewilderment. "I fainted, I do believe! Ugh, what a child you must think me."

"Indeed no, my lad," came the encouraging answer. "Children do not live through these trying days, I grieve to say. Grown men, indeed, have fallen by the score. Besides, did I not hear you say that you were a refugee from Cawn-pore?"

"Yes; I escaped from the defences with some friends, only to fall into the hands of the mutineers later."

"Then you are no child. The news of that horrible massacre has reached us, and if you escaped from that, you must be made of good stuff. But your exertions have been too much for you. Tell me, aren't you famishing? How long is it since you tasted food?"

"This morning I had a meal of cakes and water, before being taken before Indoo Khan," said Claude. "He was going to torture me. Ah—the recollection of it makes me shudder! Then you made a gallant and brilliant sortie, and in the rush to repel it I was thrust back into my cell. I escaped from it, and ever since I have been hunted like a weasel."

"Hunted in Lucknow! Surely that is extraordinary," said the officer in tones of astonishment. "The city seethes with mutineers."

"But I was under the city. I was in the vaults beneath one of the palaces, and—yes, I have news for you. I have a

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secret which may be of value. Give me food, and then take me to your commander. It is of the utmost importance."

Claude sprang to his feet. Now that he was calm, and looked back upon his recent adventures in the magazine, and the tunnels leading from it, he recollected that above them stood a palace, the balconies and windows of which formed excellent cover for the mutineers, and enabled them to command with their firearms every inch of the defences surrounding the British Residency.

"Yes, give me food, please," he repeated eagerly, "and then let me go to the officer in command."

"We will," was the ready answer. "Now, do you feel fairly strong upon your legs? Then come with me."

Linking his arm in Claude's the officer conducted him into an inner room, and placing food and drink before him urged him to eat, an invitation which he did not need to have repeated.

"Now, will you come before the brigadier as you are?" asked the officer, when Claude had taken a good meal, "or will you wash and change into other clothing?"

"I'll change, I think," responded Claude, recollecting of a sudden, now that his attention was drawn to the matter, that he was in the dress of a sepoy. "Yes," he said, surveying himself in a cracked triangle of glass which stood against the wall close to the lantern. "I feel that I am badly in need of a bath; I have grovelled for hours upon the ground, and splashed through pools of water, not to mention climbing the greasy side of a well. Is there such a thing as a tub to be had?"

"Certainly there is, my lad," the officer replied. "How we

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should get along without a cool plunge now and again I hardly like to think, for you see that our windows and doors are filled up with earth and sand-bags, and the heat is very great in consequence. Wait a few moments here. I will see that all is prepared for you."

Shortly afterwards Claude was ushered into another room, which might well have been a subterranean vault, like the magazine from which he had so recently escaped, so still was the atmosphere within it; as his new friend the officer had said, every outlet or inlet save the door was carefully blocked with earth. On the floor stood a circular tub of wood, filled with deliciously cold water, upon the surface of which floated a tiny bowl of tin which would act as a sponge and enable him to toss the fluid all over himself. Close beside it, was a cake of soap and a big towel—luxuries indeed to Claude, who had roughed it for so long.

"There you are," said the officer cheerily. "Tumble into that, while I go to the brigadier and ask if he can see you. I've no doubt he will, as few people reach us from outside. Indeed, up to this I may say that none have done so, though we believe the attempt has been made. Some have tried to steal out, but nothing has come of it, and it is more than likely that they have forfeited their lives. I can tell you that when you challenged we were on the point of firing, for you must know that quite a number of fanatics crawl up in the dead of night and bound over the walls. They are quite satisfied to be killed, so long as they can bury their tulwars in some enemy's body, and unfortunately more than one have been successful."

"I know what they are," answered Claude quietly. "We

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had to deal with them at Cawnpore. Besides, I had an encounter with one outside. As I was creeping here I stumbled across him, and, when he showed signs of being troublesome, shot him with my pistol. Then your fellows blazed away till I thought I should be riddled with bullets."

"What! You don't mean that it was your pistol that gave the alarm and drew our fire?" exclaimed the officer. "Young man, your escapes have undoubtedly been many. As yet I do not know the details of your late imprisonment, but when you tell me that you were through the siege of Cawnpore, that you escaped that ghastly massacre; and that when creeping towards our defences, having effected an escape from the mutineers, you actually fell in with one of those fanatics, who are the terror of our lives, then I say you are a lad of unusual courage and determination. I have felt the trials of this siege already, but I judge that they are as nothing to the terrors through which you have passed. But come. I am detaining you. There is your bath, and by the time you are out of it a servant will be ready with your clothes. They will be some spare ones of my own. Meanwhile I will go to our brigadier."

When he was left alone Claude quickly stripped off his sepoy uniform and got into the tub. What a luxury that bath was! If the lad who has played his hardest in the football field, and comes home caked with mud in which he has rolled, appreciates a plunge, a thorough cleansing, and then the glow, the feeling of health and comfort that follows, think how Claude revelled in the cool of the water which splashed from his head on to his shoulders and thence into the tub. Imagine with what feelings of relief he freed himself of a

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uniform in which for days he had marched across the plains of India, sometimes beneath a scorching sun, and at others when the heat was so great that active movement for a white man was considered rash, and indeed was scarcely ever undertaken. But now the times had changed. The sepoy had cunningly waited for the hot weather before hoisting the flag of revolution, and English officers and men, ay, and women too, had perforce to march long hours in the heat of the day, to toil and fight on for very existence. Too often apoplexy had carried them off; but such is the tenacity of our race, and so fine the spirit of determination which fills each individual, that numbers had survived this truly trying ordeal. And Claude was amongst them. He had borne the heat of the day, he had then been cast into prison, and after long struggling, after crawling in the dirt and damp of a noisome dungeon, had at length reached friends and comfort once more. Yes indeed, he did appreciate that bath, in spite of his surroundings.

"This is fine!" he exclaimed, a smile wreathing his handsome face. "What do the shells and bullets matter? Who cares for Indoo Khan and all his rebels from Rowpoor? I am free, free at last, when I had expected to die; and, by Jove, isn't this delicious!"

Then, from considering his own surroundings, and listening to the guns and rifles which all the while maintained a desultory engagement with the enemy, his thoughts flew back to the Ganges, to the frail craft from which he had been dragged so suddenly, and to his brother, the Heatons, the little Rajah, and Ikand.

"Where are they?" he asked himself. "What can have happened to them? Since I was captured my thoughts have

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been so fully occupied with my own troubles that I have almost forgotten my friends. I hope they met with no further adventures. It would be awful to learn that they fell into the hands of the mutineers after all. I'll not have a moment's peace until I hear that they reached friends in safety. Hillo! Come in."

The thunder of a battery firing close at hand had prevented his hearing the first knock upon the door, but at the second a sober-faced Hindu entered at his bidding, bearing a pile of clothing, all of which was neatly folded. He laid them on a chair and then stood by whilst the sahib dried himself, eyeing him the while as if Claude's sudden arrival was no unexpected thing, and as if his quaint surroundings, the banked-up windows, and the cannon without, were quite in accordance with what should be.

"The sahib's clothes are here," he said. "My orders were to help him to dress, and then to lead him to my master."

Taking each garment from the man, who was evidently the officer's valet, Claude quickly donned them, and having indicated that he was ready, the Hindu departed to fulfil his orders. Five minutes later Claude and the officer who had shown him such kindness were on their way to meet the brigadier.

"We'll be able to walk straight across the open," said the officer; "the darkness will hide our movements. During the day it is a different matter, for the enemy have sharpshooters posted in the surrounding houses, and particularly in the balconies of an old palace. From these points of vantage they command almost every foot of our defences, and our

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losses are very heavy in consequence. But here we are. Up these steps and to the left."

Walking beside Claude, they soon came to a door before which stood a native sentry. A knock upon it was followed by a loud "Come in", and they entered a large, square room. In one corner stood a light bamboo bed, covered with a mosquito curtain, and overhung by a punkah. In the centre was a table of deal, with ink-splashed top, upon which, besides numerous papers, pens, rulers, and ink, lay a large-scale map of the defences. A shaded lamp was close beside it, and over it, with head sunk in his hands, pored a man whose features were as yet invisible. Indeed, so engrossed was he that he seemed to have bidden Claude and the officer enter without being aware of it, and more than a minute passed ere he lifted his head. Meanwhile Claude took in the surroundings, and noted, amongst other things, a huge hole in the ceiling and another in the floor immediately below it.

"Ha, looking at the work of that shell!" exclaimed the officer at the table, so suddenly that Claude started. "Through the hole entered that unlucky missile which killed our gallant commander. Good-evening, sir! May I ask your name?"

"I am Claude Watson, nephew of the dewan of Rowpoor," answered Claude, looking at the brigadier, who was an officer with powerful features and fine presence. "I have just escaped from the mutineers."

"So I have heard, Mr. Watson, and I marvel at it. There are few who have contrived to do so single-handed. I fear, however, that you have not arrived at actual safety yet, for, though we keep the sepoy out, we are very hard pressed. Indeed we have only sixteen hundred and ninety-two men

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and officers, and of that number seven hundred and sixty-five are natives. All too few to man our large defences. Opposing us are huge forces of the enemy, which approach in number to a hundred thousand. I tell you this not to fill you with dismay, but so that you may realize your position. Heavy odds, after all, are what Englishmen have nearly always to face.

"You see me engaged in looking at this map, and I will now point out to you one of our great difficulties and dangers. The batteries which surround us, and send hundreds of shells crashing into our lines, are not to be compared with the danger which this presents."

The brigadier placed his finger on the outline of an irregular building just beyond the walls of the Residency, and invited Claude to look.

"That is one of the palaces," he proceeded. "From its balconies the sepoy sharpshooters fire down upon our brave fellows and kill many, while from a shaft sunk close to it, as far as we can gather, galleries are run towards our walls and mines exploded. That, Mr. Watson, is a point upon which you will have to keep a constant watch."

"It is the enemy's magazine too, sir," said Claude quietly. "Beneath that palace is a huge vault in which hundreds of barrels of powder are stored, besides cartridges."

"A magazine as well? It is quite likely," said the brigadier, looking Claude in the face, and favouring him with a piercing gaze. "How comes it that you know of its existence?"

"A trap-door by which I escaped from my cell led to it. From the magazine one gallery runs to the street, while

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another comes in this direction, and opens half-way down a well."

"And after that? How does one emerge?" asked the brigadier eagerly.

"Some iron rungs enabled me to reach the opening above, and from there I crawled to the walls and called to the defenders."

"Then there is an entrance close at hand," exclaimed the brigadier, showing unusual excitement. "Do the natives know of it? Did they pursue you along the tunnel of which you speak?"

"No, sir," replied Claude. "They were afraid to. Apparently they have never explored it."

"Then we have a grand opportunity," cried the general eagerly. "We will destroy the enemy, and free ourselves from those harassing sharpshooters. Ah! but I am running ahead. To reach that magazine would be a desperate enterprise. It is too much to expect or ask of any man."

"Not if the man knew its secrets as I do," said Claude quietly, looking the brigadier steadily in the face. "If I were down below now, sir, and you gave the order to fire the magazine, the explosion would follow in less than a minute."

"But how? Does not excitement or eagerness to help our cause carry you away?" asked the general.

"No, sir. I am stating the truth. A fuse to give time to enable one to escape, and a match with which to light it, would send the palace into the air."

"But, my lad, you are certainly wrong. Think for a moment, and you will agree with me. Of what use is this

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match and this fuse of which you speak, even supposing you have a man bold enough to make the attempt? How could they bring about the destruction of the magazine and the palace above it? A hundred fuses would not fire the powder unless in contact with it. A train is necessary."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I should have mentioned that the train is already laid. All is, in fact, ready for the destruction of the magazine," Claude answered quickly.

"What! Already laid! Impossible!" exclaimed the brigadier. Then, seeing Claude flush to the roots of his hair, he started from his seat, and approaching him, laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"I was wrong to say that," he said earnestly. "I have not yet heard your story, and it may well be that one who has escaped from the mutineers and from Cawnpore—as our friend Captain Belpus tells me you have—has even gone so far as to plan the blowing up of the palace on his own account. Tell me; is that the case?"

"It is, sir," Claude answered steadily. "If the mutineers had discovered me at the bottom of the well I should have had to climb to the open and make a rush for the walls. In broad daylight that would have been madness."

"It would certainly," the general agreed.

"I realized that," went on Claude, "and in the absence of the mutineers I laid a train from the magazine to my hiding-place. Had they found me, I was prepared to fire it."

"That was nobly determined," said the general warmly. "But surely it threatened destruction to yourself? Now sit down and tell me all that has happened, and if possible give me plans of the magazine. There are many here who are

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amongst the bravest of our army, and perhaps one will volunteer for the enterprise."

"Why ask one who is a stranger to those underground passages?" Claude answered quietly. "Let me rest for a day, and then, with your permission, sir, I will creep out to the well at night and set fire to the train."

CHAPTER XV

A Hero indeed

FOR a minute and more Brigadier Inglis, the officer upon whom the anxious post of commander of the garrison and defences of Lucknow had fallen, stood eyeing Claude in silence; while the latter, together with Captain Belpus, who had been the first to welcome him, and who had accompanied him to the sanctum of the general, watched curiously, and indeed anxiously, to learn, if possible, by the expression of their leader's face whether he would accept the offer.

It was evident that the brigadier was troubled. At first, if the truth be told, an expression of relief had flashed across his face, for here, indeed, was an opportunity to rid himself of one of the greatest dangers which threatened the Residency. Then, as his eyes turned towards Claude again, and noted his youth, the task to be accomplished seemed too great, too hazardous, to be attempted by such a lad.

"He is too young. The danger would overawe him," he murmured absently. "A desperate man is wanted for this work, one who would willingly volunteer to lead a forlorn hope."

Again he became silent, his eyes fell to the table, and mechanically he commenced to trace the line of the defences upon the map lying there.

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"If the passage were an open one it would be different," he went on, speaking in low tones, but addressing no one. "I can fully appreciate the fact that one who knows the way would have far greater hopes of success. But even then it is a desperate enterprise. He is a bold young fellow. He has already escaped when others would have fallen. Can I conscientiously accept his offer and send him upon such a daring errand?"

It was a difficult question, and many moments passed before the general came to a decision. If possible his brow became even more furrowed, so deeply were his thoughts engaged, and involuntarily he raised his eyes from the map to the gaping hole in the roof. As he stood, the distant crackle of musketry from the roofs of the defences came to his ears, and the occasional thunder of a cannon. Once all sounds of conflict ceased, and absolute silence reigned, but only for an instant; refreshed and strengthened as it were by the temporary lull, the guns roared out again, the explosions being followed by distant shouts. Then came the patter of busy rifles, and—yes, some poor fellow close at hand gave a despairing shriek as a bullet struck him, while a moment later the dull sound of men running to his assistance could be heard. Boom! crash! A mighty explosion set the houses about, and the Residency itself, shaking to their very foundations, and a spout of flame shot high into the air, illuminating the darkness.

"A mine!" exclaimed the general with a start. "I fear we have suffered. Ah! here comes someone with the news. Come in, please."

As he spoke someone knocked loudly upon the door, and

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entered. It was an officer who had come straight from the scene of the explosion.

"Well, what is the news, Captain Romer?" asked the general. "Have any of our poor fellows been killed?"

"Four or five, sir," was the answer. "The mutineers sprang a mine right beneath our feet, and it is wonderful that more have not lost their lives. We are now busy repairing the breach."

"Where was the passage driven from?" the general asked.

"From the palace which overlooks the defences, sir. They have been successful for the second time from that quarter, and now that they have done the mischief, their sharpshooters are crowded in the balconies, and are pouring shot upon our men. Can we not do something to stop them?"

The officer looked eagerly at the general, hoping with all his heart that permission might be given for a sortie to be made then and there.

"We will put up with the danger and loss for a few hours longer, Captain Romer," answered the general with decision, "and then I promise you that something shall be done. I have a plan for attacking the mutineers in that quarter. Return now to your men, and encourage them to wait."

"Now, Mr. Watson," he went on when the officer had retired, "are you still prepared to blow up that magazine? The risk is great, but so is the honour and glory to be won if you succeed. Tell me truthfully, are you still willing to face the danger? If you have changed your mind and decline I shall not think the worse of you, for hundreds besides you would do the same. Now, what is your answer?"

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"I have asked to be allowed to go, sir," Claude replied quietly, looking the brigadier in the face. "I alone know the way to this magazine, and therefore should have greater hopes of success than anyone else. You tell me, and I can see for myself, that heavy losses are incurred, and will still be incurred while that palace stands. Then let me make the attempt soon. If I succeed, the knowledge that I have done my duty and have brought relief to my countrymen will be of far more value than all the honour and glory in the world."

"Bravely spoken! A noble determination!" exclaimed the brigadier, stepping forward and shaking Claude warmly by hand. "Destroy that palace and magazine for us, Mr. Watson, and you will indeed have done us a valuable service. All who garrison this besieged town will have good cause to bless you. The women and children will remember your name to the end of their days, and England will not forget."

"But there; why do I speak in that manner when I know that the sense of doing your duty carries you on without thought of thanks. Now sit down and discuss this matter, and as a preliminary let me warn you both to keep the plan secret. For though a careful watch is kept, there are spies about who report our movements to the enemy."

Seating himself in a chair, Brigadier Inglis motioned Claude and his companion to two others, and bade the former tell him of the adventures which had befallen him since he escaped from Cawnpore.

Then the plans for blowing up the magazine were carefully prepared, Claude being invited to choose his own time.

"I propose to undertake the matter to-morrow night," he

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said. "You see, sir, I am feeling quite done up with all my exertions since leaving Cawnpore, and if I left the defences now I should be scarcely in the condition for a prolonged struggle, should that become necessary. Besides, once the powder is fired and the palace razed to the ground, I propose to cross the river in the direction of Allahabad."

"What! Leave us, my lad?"

"That is what I have planned to do, with your permission, sir. The fact is that I am anxious to learn what has befallen my brother and the boat-load of friends whom I left on the Ganges. To escape from your lines just now would be a most difficult undertaking, but if the magazine explodes there is certain to be much confusion, and I could take advantage of it to slip away."

"And afterwards, Mr. Watson? There are still miles of open country to traverse," said the general.

"I will hide in the woods during the day and march at night, sir. I shall take good care to be properly disguised, and as I speak the language fairly fluently I ought to reach Allahabad in safety. But of course there is no certainty, and I shall just have to take my chance. Can I do as I have proposed?"

"I feel almost that I ought to say 'no' to that," the general replied with a kindly smile. "But then the thought that, by escaping from the Residency and communicating with friends, you will materially aid our cause occurs to me, and compels me to agree. After all, if your pluck enables you to destroy the magazine, it will certainly help you to slip safely through the ranks of the mutineers. Yes, leave us, my lad, and may fortune favour you, for you certainly deserve it. Now I can

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see that it is as much as you can do to keep awake. Take him away, and see that he has a comfortable shake-down, Captain Belpus. To-morrow we will complete our plans for this momentous enterprise.

“Good-night, Mr. Watson! To-morrow, when you come to see me again, I will narrate to you the facts of this siege, and will tell you what hopes we have of success. Then, should you eventually reach our friends—as I feel assured you will—you will be able to give them such particulars of us as will help them in their arduous work of relief, for there is no doubt that a column will be launched in this direction in the hope of raising the siege. Good-night! It is superfluous to wish you refreshing sleep, for that is assured after your exertions.”

Shaking hands with Claude, the brigadier conducted him to the door. Then Captain Belpus took him by the arm and led him across to his quarters.

“There,” he said, pointing to a bed which stood in one corner, “tumble on to that, and sleep till morning.”

Without further bidding Claude lifted the tattered mosquito curtain, and, creeping beneath it, threw himself upon the pallet. Then his head nestled into the pillow and his eyes closed. A minute later he was in a deep sleep, and he did not stir or make a movement of any sort till late on the following morning. Opening his eyes lazily, and languidly turning his head, it was some time before he realized his position, or recollected the fact that he was now safely within the defences of Lucknow. Indeed the deep and refreshing sleep had banished from his memory all the incidents of his escape from the well, and of his subsequent adventures. Even his interview with

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Brigadier Inglis, and the dangerous task which he had promised that officer he would perform, were gone from his mind. Once more his eyelids closed heavily, and he would have dropped into a second sleep had not the fancy that he was still in the subterranean passage seized him. Yes, there was the same gloom about him, and there, twinkling like a star in the distance, was the tiny oil-lamp set upon the stone barricade beyond which no mutineer had dared to pass. Where was the black trail of gunpowder into which the muzzle of his pistol was thrust? Ah! there it was, and with eyes now wide open, but with brain still only half-aroused, Claude lay on his pallet, staring at a light which flickered in the darkness of an adjoining room. Then, with a thrill which set his heart beating like a hammer, he suddenly observed a dim figure standing beside him.

"They have found me out!" he thought. "I'll fire the train and blow up the magazine!"

Starting into a sitting position, he tugged vainly at the edge of the pallet, and then fell back upon the pillow with a nervous laugh, for the voice of the native servant who had attended him on the previous evening broke the silence.

"Sahib," he said softly, "the sun is now high overhead, and you have slept for many hours. My master bade me stand beside you till you awoke. What is your bidding, sahib?"

"By Jove! What a fright you gave me!" Claude answered. "I thought you were one of the mutineers who had tracked me, and I was about to settle the whole matter by firing the train, when—heigho! What a grand sleep I have had! I'm in Lucknow, I suppose."

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"The sahib speaks the truth. He is in the defences. What are his wishes?"

"A bath and then breakfast. I'm as hungry as a hunter."

"In five minutes the one shall be ready, sahib, and the other when you are dressed. I will go now to carry out the order."

The native servant salaamed in the darkness, and went from the room as silently as a ghost, leaving Claude, now wide awake, lying thinking upon his pallet.

"How strange!" he said with a laugh. "I quite thought I was down in the magazine again, and, by Jove, what a start that fellow gave me! But I must be careful. It will not do to talk about firing trains or blowing up palaces, for the general told me that there are spies everywhere, and the slightest suspicion that some big thing was on to-night would make the enemy more alert, and ruin my chances. Well, I could easily sleep for another hour or more, but I've business before me. Dear me! What a fine rest I've had!"

He lay full length upon the pallet and stretched himself till his joints cracked. Then, leaving his bed, he went into the adjoining room and was soon enjoying his bath. Ten minutes later he was seated at breakfast, and within an hour was ready to take his place amongst the defenders.

"It's my turn for duty again," said Captain Belpus, joining him. "I've had a good sleep, like yourself, and am now returning to the walls. Come with me. There, we've heaps of rifles, so take one of these and pass the bayonet through your belt, for you may need it. Just now things are quiet, but one can never be too careful. When the mutineers seem to have

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drawn off for a time, the probability is that some thousands may have collected in another quarter ready to take us unawares. However, they are cowardly beggars, for it is seldom they have made a dangerous rush, though if they only came on determinedly I cannot think how we could keep them out. You see, our men are posted at big intervals, and it is quite impossible to reinforce a threatened portion of the defences without dangerously weakening other parts. But here we are. My post is on the roof of the house, whence I can direct the operations of those to right and left, who are under my immediate command. Keep your head and shoulders down when we reach the top, for those mutineer sharpshooters have eyes like hawks, and they are all picked shots."

Leading the way beside a wall which gave protection from flying bullets, hundreds of which constantly hurtled above the Residency, Captain Belpus stopped at a narrow doorway and shrugged his shoulders, smiling, as he pointed to a shell which burst some fifty yards away at that moment.

"Nasty things when you are unaccustomed to them," he said. "There is nothing that makes a raw recruit feel worse than the unearthly shriek of one of those monsters. But, bless you, within a few hours he laughs at them, and so long as they do not pitch directly upon him, cares nothing for them. I suppose you had a good number thrown at you whilst besieged in Cawnpore?"

"More than were pleasant," answered Claude. "You see, if we had been men alone we should have laughed as you do here. But our unfortunate women and children were housed in the very centre of the entrenchments, and the buildings drew the fire of every gun and rifle in the place."

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"Then we are, perhaps, a little better off," the captain said, "for our womenfolk are divided into parties, some being beneath the Residency. Brave souls they all are too; when we men are hard pressed they often aid us in repairing the breaches made by the enemy's shell. Still, what with casualties from bullets and deaths from sickness our losses are very heavy. Ah, good-morning, Mrs. Simpkins! Children well, I hope?"

"Quite," answered a lady who stood just within the doorway through which Claude and his guide had entered. "They awoke when the mine blew up last night, but went to sleep again directly. Any news for us, Captain Belpus?"

"Perhaps there will be some to-night, Mrs. Simpkins. Our young friend here hopes to do us a service. But—hush! Do not ask more questions. If he is successful, you will hear the news in good time. Come along, Watson."

Following his leader Claude soon found himself upon the roof of the house, and, mindful of the warning which had been given him, at once bent almost double and ran rapidly to the edge, where a parapet of sand-bags was erected. Three men were lying behind it, one dressed in the tattered uniform of an officer.

"Anything to report?" asked Captain Belpus, throwing himself down beside this man.

"Nothing. Since the mine was fired they have kept quiet; but there will be another flying about our ears soon, unless we are careful. May I go now?"

"Yes, it's your turn for a snooze," was the answer. "I'll take charge."

Nodding to his comrades, who were civilians, the young

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officer crept to one corner of the roof and lay down upon the stone-work, a folded coat beneath his head, and a blanket stretched as an awning above him.

"That's where we turn in," remarked Captain Belpus. "You see, whenever there is need of us we are close at hand; and then the alarms are so frequent that it is only by sleeping on the spot that one can squeeze in any rest at all."

"What about the mines?" asked Claude. "How are you going to prevent their firing more?"

"By driving galleries of our own. The Sikhs and Hindustanis, who have stuck to us like bricks, are invaluable as sappers. The heat below is overpowering, while the danger of being buried alive, or of being hoisted into the sky by a counter-mine, is ever present. Up to this we've located three of their tunnels, and we reckon that we have done them enormous damage. But wait till to-night, my lad. I fancy we shall surprise them. By the way, are you still determined to risk it?"

Captain Belpus leant across to Claude, and whispered the question in his ear, while he looked searchingly into his face.

"Quite determined. I'm just taking stock of the surroundings," said Claude quietly, gazing through one of the loopholes. "There is the palace, you see, and there, if you look very carefully, you will catch sight of the well. From that point the tunnel curves and twists, but on the whole its direction is steady, and I imagine it must end immediately beneath the palace. Now, about a way of escape. Who guards the iron bridge across the Goomtee?"

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"Our guns will reach it, Watson, but the mutineers hold the place. You'd be clever if you crossed it."

"It is the nearest way to Allahabad, and I shall try to take it," Claude answered stoutly. "If necessary I'll swim the river."

"And suppose the mutineers occupy the farther shore in force?" suggested the captain. "We hear that a relief force will march this way, and no doubt the enemy is aware of the fact, and will prepare to oppose our troops."

"I've thought of that, Captain Belpus," said Claude quietly, "and in that case I shall slip away in the opposite direction and make for Delhi. From there my news can be telegraphed, while I can accompany any troops who may be marching for Allahabad. But, I say, look over there!"

He pointed through the loophole as he spoke.

"There's something up," the officer said excitedly. "The mutineers are massing behind the palace. Stay here while I send the warning round. Ah—!"

Captain Belpus started to his feet with an exclamation of dismay, for a dull explosion shook the air at that moment.

"Another mine on the south wall," he shouted. "Look, there come the mutineers to the assault!"

Peering over the breast-work, Claude saw that some ten yards of the defences along the south side had been swept away by a mine, and that, under cover of an exceedingly heavy fire of guns and musketry, swarms of the enemy were advancing. A minute later his attention and all his energies were attracted in another direction. With extraordinary cunning the rebels had contrived to run a second mine a few yards to the right of the house on the roof of which he lay.

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With a flash and a roar it exploded, and when the smoke had cleared away there was a gaping chasm in the wall, towards which another force of mutineers were rushing.

"Hold your fire and keep under cover till I give the word," cried Captain Belpus, standing up in spite of the heavy cannonade directed against that part of the defences, and waving his hand to his men. "Get your spare rifles ready, and when the time comes let them have it."

Then, turning to Claude and the others upon the roof, he said sharply: "Fix bayonets, my lads, and then back to your loopholes. When I shout, pepper them hotly, and throw these grenades amongst them. If the boys below are pressed too hard, I'll call upon you to join them. Ready all?"

"Ay, and waiting, sir," came back in a gruff voice.

"Fire!" shouted the captain, springing upon the breast-work in his excitement. "Fire!"

Never before had Claude seen the mutineers come on with such determination. It seemed as though they had reserved all their pluck and energy for this one effort, and had made up their minds to conquer at all hazards. With bayonets fixed and arms at the trail they came dashing madly forward, careless, it seemed, of the cannon-shot which plunged through them, tearing wide lanes through their ranks. Gaps were instantly filled, a dead comrade was spurned beneath their feet, as, frantic to slay, with flaming eyes, they rushed to the attack, filling the air with fierce shouts.

"Fire!" At the sound a storm of musketry burst from the defenders who manned that part of the walls. "Fire!" Their second muskets emptied their contents into the seething mass, while some dozen men came struggling forward at the moment,

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tugging at a gun. With superhuman efforts they dragged it into the breach and slewed the muzzle round.

"Stand aside there," came in the calmest tones from a youthful officer.

Bang! The cannon recoiled a yard and more as it hurled its charge of grape into the mutineers. But the little crew of gunners were upon it in an instant, frantically reloading it.

Ah! Torn by the iron hail, the enemy lost courage and were about to run, when one of their officers sprang before them, waving his sword and calling to them.

"Upon the feringhees!" he shouted. "Death to the sons of Sheitan!" With shrill cries of rage his men bounded forward and threw themselves into the breach.

"They'll be through it if we don't help our boys!" cried Captain Belpus. "At them with your bayonets, my lads."

Following him, the remainder of the occupants of the roof raced down the stairs and joined their comrades below. Then, with a shout, they threw themselves upon the enemy, and, thrusting fiercely in all directions, drove them out of the breach.

"Back! Out of the way, boys!" the gunner officer cried again, and waiting only for the besieged to spring clear of the muzzle, fired the gun.

"Hurrah! They're off! Let them have it as hot as you can," cried Captain Belpus; and at once every man who was able clambered to the top of the parapet and poured as heavy a fire as possible into the retreating foe. Then the business of repairing the defences was commenced, while the gunners, under the orders of their imperturbable officer, having carefully sponged their gun, dragged it away. Meanwhile the

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wounded and sick, who had crept from the hospitals to help in beating off the attackers, returned to their couches, and Lucknow settled down once more to its accustomed condition. Only the broken defences and the piled-up dead outside told the tale of another unsuccessful assault which had cost the enemy dear.

CHAPTER XVI

Fighting for Life

FOR considerably more than a month the conflict had raged, and each day, each hour, indeed, saw a further spread of the rebellion, brought news of some new atrocity. In the north of India a sea of mutineers surged through the country, overflowing villages and towns, murdering and slaying whenever there was an opportunity, but, in spite of their huge numbers, being beaten back from a few isolated spots, veritable islands in this frantic, heaving ocean, upon which the broad flag of Old England still proudly waved.

More than a month had passed, and each succeeding day the cable had brought dire messages across the water to London, and from there the news had been spread all over Europe. So many massacres and so many misfortunes had befallen civilians and soldiers that the civilized world stood aghast, prophesying the utter destruction of English rule in India; while amongst those of our race a feeling of despondency was present rivalling that which all experienced during the early days of the late Boer war, when our gallant troops had met with checks which were almost disasters. Who of us that is old enough to remember can forget the dismay, the feeling of anxiety, which prevailed when the tale of Magersfontein and the Modder River came; when our force was compelled to retire from before Stormberg; and when all

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eyes were turned anxiously upon that hot, dusty plain in Natal where stood Ladysmith, in which a bare ten thousand brave troops under Sir George White upheld the British flag against a host of Boers, and that in spite of starvation and disease, while outside, south of the Tugela, the gallant and imperturbable Buller fought hard to relieve him?

But there were capable leaders and good soldiers in India who, undaunted by the enormous difficulties of the task, promptly set about quelling the rebellion. We have already seen how, under the admirable guidance of Sir John Lawrence, the Europeans in the Punjaub grappled with the movement. How, not content with disarming and disbanding sepoy whose intended mutiny had been forecasted by that ominous telegram from Delhi, the troops had promptly marched against the mutineers in the surrounding districts, and, dispersing them, had pushed on to the very heart of the rebellion, to Delhi, and taken up a commanding position to wait for reinforcements to reach them ere they essayed the capture of the city. General Havelock also, it will be remembered, had come post-haste from Persia to Allahabad, and with a slender force of fourteen hundred men had marched in the direction of Cawnpore.

By July 11th he had reached Futtehpore, and was encamped after a hard day's march, when the guns of the Nana sahib opened upon him. Eagerly obeying the call of their leader, the British troops promptly left their bivouac, and the meal which all needed, and threw themselves upon the enemy. Dashing forward, supported by excellently directed gun-fire and by a thin line of riflemen, they pressed the rebels back, putting them to flight and capturing eleven guns, and that

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without the loss of a single man at their hands. Twelve gallant fellows, however, died of sunstroke, and no wonder, for before the action opened they had marched for fourteen hours under a grilling sun.

On the 15th, Havelock advanced on the Pandoo Nuddy, a river of fair proportions, hoping to secure the bridge. Brushing aside the mutineers, who had collected to bar his progress at Aong, he pushed rapidly forward, and, aided by as gallant a force as ever marched, quickly captured the bridge. On the following day, after a hot and tiring march, the main body of the Nana sahib's army was encountered. Worn out as the men were, they cheerfully advanced to the attack, and in spite of fierce resistance were again successful, scattering the enemy far and wide. That night Cawnpore lay at the feet of the British. In nine days they had marched one hundred and twenty-six miles, and won four battles! A glorious achievement indeed!

In the morning the victorious troops marched into Cawnpore, only to discover that a dreadful atrocity had been added to the many which had already marked the course of the mutiny. No less than two hundred hapless women and children, the survivors of the surrendered garrison of Cawnpore or who had fallen into the hands of the bloodthirsty Nana sahib in other ways, had been slaughtered ere the troops who had marched and fought so hard to save them arrived. Imprisoned in the two tiny rooms of a native clerk's house, they had been almost starved, and treated with the utmost harshness. Then, when all hope of beating the British had gone, the followers of the cruel Lord of Bhitoor had fallen upon them at his orders, and had slain

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them with the sword. Afterwards, stripped of their clothing, the bodies had been cast into a well.

What pen can describe the scene when the ghastly details became known to Havelock's troops? With set faces they forced their way, one by one, into the death-chamber, to emerge with a cap, a shoe, or a tiny stocking, which each one thrust amongst his kit, there to treasure. Yes, men to whom fighting was a trade, but to whom killing for the sake of killing was abhorrent, left that place determined to slay, to give no mercy when mutineers fell into their hands. And lest they should run the danger of relenting, each bearded man, each lad who was little more than a recruit, kept some article close at hand, the sight of which should steel his heart. "Remember Cawnpore! Remember the ladies and children!" became their watchword. It is even related that a company of Highlanders, discovering the body of some poor girl, cut off her tresses and swore that for each hair a rebel life should pay the penalty.

But enough of such horrors. Cawnpore retaken, Havelock decided to march at once to the relief of Lucknow, knowing that to keep his soldiers back now was almost impossible. The men demanded eagerly to be led against the foe, and therefore, leaving a garrison in Cawnpore, he crossed the Ganges and invaded Oudh, his face steadfastly set in the direction of the beleaguered Residency in which Claude had found a haven.

And thus, with hosts to bar their progress, we will leave them and their gallant leader, and once more join our hero.

"The brigadier's compliments, and he would be glad to see you and Mr. Watson now," said a British soldier, coming to

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a halt in front of Captain Belpus on the evening after Claude had assisted in repulsing the enemy at the breach. "He desires to know whether your defences have been reconstructed after the damage caused by the mine, and whether you can safely leave your men for a time."

"I can come at once, tell the general," the captain replied. "Now, Watson," he called out as the orderly departed, "you're to have your final interview. The general has sent for both of us."

Carefully picking their way across the open space, and taking advantage of every chance of cover that presented, Claude and his companion were not long in reaching the general's sanctum.

"Come in," he cried when the captain knocked, and a moment later they were before him, finding him seated at the table as before.

"Good-evening," said the general cheerfully. "So you have already been hotly engaged, Mr. Watson? The enemy attacked boldly, and I am thankful that we beat them off. My spies tell me that they lost fully four hundred in killed, while very many must have been wounded. But now to discuss this matter. Be seated, please.

"I want you to listen very carefully, Mr. Watson," he went on, "for I am about to tell you a few facts of importance about the siege, which I wish you to commit to memory. You have shown that you have good sense, and are thoroughly reliable, so I shall not hesitate to lay all our secrets before you, knowing that should you fall into the hands of the mutineers—which God forbid—they will be safe in your keeping."

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"You may rely upon my silence, sir," replied Claude quietly, his thoughts at the same moment flying back to that eventful hour, not so very long ago, when Indoo Khan and his fakir threatened him with torture.

"It would be hard to keep silent when those hot irons were burning one's flesh," he said to himself, "but then, what a coward I should be to allow torture to affect me!"

At that his face set sternly, and looking the general steadily in the eye, he repeated his assurance.

"You can rely upon my silence under any circumstances, sir," he said.

"I know I can, my lad," was the hearty answer. "Now listen."

For nearly a quarter of an hour the general spoke in low tones, and then asked Claude to repeat his words.

"Just run over all the points," he said. "Of course you cannot remember every sentence, but it is important that you should recollect the general sense."

"Ah, that is good! Capital!" he said when Claude had done as he asked. "Now, if troops are scarce, as I am sure they will be for a time, you can tell our friends that the Residency can hold out for at least two months longer. I mean, of course, that food and ammunition will outlast that time. Our lives are in God's hands. Now, having heard all that I had to tell you, let me know how I can help you to undertake this task to-night?"

"I shall want a couple of good fuses, an axe, and a box of lucifers," said Claude. "The axe will enable me to break in the heads of the powder-casks, and will serve, too, as a weapon of defence should I need one."

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"And as regards a disguise? You will not, of course, make the attempt in your present dress?"

"No, sir. I have been thinking the matter out, and have decided to appear this time as an irregular. The budmashes, as the criminal classes are known, have joined the sepoy in large numbers. I have observed that they dress in many ways, and indeed often wear a portion of the uniform of a sepoy. If I go out with a loin-cloth and a rough blanket, such as all seem to carry, I shall not be noticeable, and in the folds I can easily hide a revolver. That and the axe should serve my purpose."

"I think you are right," the general answered slowly. "As you have told me, you speak the language with some fluency, and should have no trouble on that score. Yes, as a budmash you should have a good chance of evading the enemy. But you will have to be very, very careful. Now, when will you make the attempt?"

"At midnight, sir. There will be few in the magazine then, and the explosion coming about that hour will lead to great confusion. I propose to dine now, and then dress. After that I shall slip over the wall and make for the well."

"Then I will bid you 'good-bye' now, my lad," said the general, rising from his chair to clasp Claude eagerly by the hand. "Good-bye, my lad, and good luck!"

Accompanying Claude to the door, Brigadier Inglis bade him farewell in the most hearty and touching manner, and returned to his seat.

"It seems wrong to let him go," he murmured sadly. "The lad is so young, so courageous. But these are hard and dangerous times, and when such an opportunity occurs

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to do damage to the enemy, I must allow no feeling of sentiment to alter my determination. Heaven preserve the lad!"

Meanwhile Claude had run across the open and regained his quarters once more, where he and Captain Belpus sat down to a scanty meal. That finished, he took a bath, and having thoroughly dried himself with a towel, proceeded to coat his body with a plentiful supply of lampblack and oil. It was not a very pleasant undertaking; but the lampblack served his purpose well, and within an hour he was thoroughly transformed. Captain Belpus then shaved his head.

"There," he said, stepping back a pace or two as he finished the task, and surveying Claude with the aid of the lamp, "you look a regular budmash, and a bad one, too, if you'll excuse my saying it. There's an air of reckless determination about you which fits the character. Here is the blanket, and here also are the other things for which you asked."

Taking the axe from his companion, Claude thrust it into the cloth which was wound about his waist. He also contrived to hide a revolver there. The fuses and the box of lucifers he rolled in the blanket, together with some cakes which Captain Belpus advised him to take.

"What is the time now?" he asked when all was in readiness.

"Five minutes to twelve," said the captain almost curtly, biting his lips to keep them from trembling. "Time's up, I think, Watson."

"Yes, I must be off," Claude agreed. "Good-bye, Captain Belpus, and many thanks for your kindness. By the way, will you ask your men to hold their fire for a time, for it

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would be bad luck to be hit by one of our own bullets after so many escapes."

"It would, Watson. I'll see to it. Now, there is the wall. Wait for a couple of minutes while I pass the word along. Good-bye, old fellow!"

Cordially squeezing Claude's hand the captain hastened away.

Waiting in the dimly-lit chamber Claude employed the two minutes in inspecting his fuses and revolvers again, to make sure that they were in position. Then, stepping towards the cracked triangle of glass which had served his purpose on a former occasion, he inspected himself with some amount of curiosity.

"Yes," he murmured, "the loss of my hair and the lamp-black have given me the appearance of a desperado. I ought to pass easily amongst the mutineers. But time is up. I must be going."

He left the house and moved cautiously towards the barricade.

"Now for it," he said. "There's the wall and over we go."

Tucking the folded blanket under his arm he scrambled over the piled-up sand-bags and dropped lightly on the farther side. Then, as he looked up at the roof of the house which he had just quitted, a row of dark heads, dimly seen in the gloom, attracted his attention.

"Good-bye, my lad!" came in Brigadier Inglis's voice. "The best of fortune."

"Good-bye," answered Claude in a whisper.

A moment later he was gone, and one by one the watchers

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above, after staring vainly into the darkness, disappeared, to lie behind their parapets, counting the minutes, the seconds indeed, waiting for a mighty explosion which would tell them of Claude's success, or for shouts and the noise of conflict to sadden them with the thought that he had been discovered and killed.

"I've got my bearings, and so shall walk steadily across to the well," said Claude to himself as he left the defences. "If I come across one of those fanatics again it will be bad luck; but it is extremely unlikely, for, after all, not many of the enemy are willing to sacrifice their lives in such a way."

Traversing the open space which intervened, Claude moved towards the well with the silence of a ghost; but for a pair of thin leather sandals his feet were bare, and made no sound.

Counting each step carefully, he halted when he had accomplished one hundred and sixty, and lay down upon the ground to endeavour to ascertain his surroundings. It was a fine bright night fortunately, and though figures were invisible at a few yards' distance, buildings, walls, and other objects could be seen dimly. A careful scrutiny, therefore, quickly disclosed the whereabouts of the goal for which he was making, and within five minutes he was lying beside the well.

"I'll leave the blanket here," he said, "and will tuck the fuses and the matches into my loin-cloth. There, that's it. The revolver is handy in case I want it, and I'll carry the axe now. If there's trouble I'll use it in preference to the shooter."

Not for a moment did his pluck or calmness slacken, and now that he was at the entrance to the magazine he prepared

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for the final and most hazardous stage of his enterprise with the full determination to carry it through.

“Yes,” he repeated doggedly, “if there’s trouble I will use it, and without hesitation too. After the treachery I witnessed at Cawnpore I should be a fool to spare any mutineer who happened to discover me.”

Glancing about him to make sure that no one was near, he felt for the first rung of the iron ladder, and swinging himself over the coping of the well, commenced to descend, the handle of the axe gripped firmly between his teeth. A minute later he gained the entrance to the tunnel, and, going upon hands and knees, began to crawl along it towards the magazine.

Ah! At last he came to the angle, peering round which he had been able to see the barricade of stones, with the lamp glimmering above it.

“There it is!” he said breathlessly, catching sight of a twinkling flame. “I wonder whether a guard is sleeping there?”

For more than a minute he remained staring at the lamp, and then, firmly resolved to fall upon the first rebel upon whom he might stumble, he crept forward again and soon reached the barricade.

Raising his head slowly, he had just time to observe a lanky figure on the farther side, when the shaft of his axe struck against one of the boulders which formed the barricade, giving a sharp clink, which sounded startlingly loud in the silence of the tunnel.

“What was that?” exclaimed someone in Hindustani in accents of alarm. “Ah!”

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The man whom Claude had seen stretched out upon the opposite side of the barricade, started to his feet and peered into the darkness, while his fingers nervously felt for the smoking lamp. But ere he could reach it, the dim rays it gave out enabled him to discover Claude, and instantly he sprang backwards a step, to remain there transfixed for the moment with terror, too thunderstruck even to shout. Then his hand sought for a rifle, and within a few seconds he would have discharged it and then fled for his life, when something swished in the air, and the blade of the axe which Claude carried struck full upon the man's forehead, sending him crashing to the ground.

"It was a lucky shot," said Claude a few moments later. "If I had missed him altogether, he would have been gone like a flash, to return with swarms of his friends. And if I had merely stunned him, I should have found myself face to face with another difficulty, for however treacherous and cruel these mutineers have proved, it is hard for an Englishman to leave a wounded man in a magazine which he intends to explode. It's lucky, therefore, for him and for me that I killed him. Now for the powder-barrels. But first let us see whether the train I made still exists."

Taking the lamp in one hand, Claude returned along the tunnel, to find that in parts the continuity of the powder-train had been broken by himself as he had crawled over the ground. Then, again, the dampness of this strange subterranean passage had marred other portions. So, as it would not do to risk failure, he determined to relay it.

"I'll just go through the magazine and make sure that it is clear of mutineers," he said, "and then there shall be an

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explosion. Quite five minutes have passed already, so I expect those who have got wind of the attempt in Lucknow will be waiting anxiously. Still, they will recollect that it takes time to prepare a train, and will perhaps be patient."

Taking the precaution to leave the lamp upon the barricade, he hurriedly crept into the main part of the magazine. There were the piled-up barrels and cases as before, save, perhaps, that a few had been removed to supply the batteries manned by the rebels. But sufficient were there for his purpose, enough and to spare. A hasty inspection showed him that he was alone in the magazine, and he promptly set about his preparations.

Searching in the darkness he lifted barrel after barrel from the heap, and, having placed it on end, stove in the wood-work with a few blows of his axe. Others he treated in the same way without moving them, but in every case he thrust his hands into the interior and scattered the powder in all directions.

"Now for the train," he said. "I'll take an opened barrel and walk backwards, pouring the contents out."

Suiting the action to the word, he quickly completed the work as far as the barricade; then, taking the utmost precautions to avoid a premature explosion, he lifted the lamp and inspected the train.

"The fire will flash along that at a tremendous rate," he exclaimed with satisfaction. "Now I'll do the same on the other side."

Taking a fresh barrel he repeated the manœuvre, laying a trail of black dots as far as the angle beyond which the lamp became invisible. Then he retraced his steps once more, and

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with the aid of the light satisfied himself that there was no break in the train.

"I'll put the fuses just round the angle," he said. "Then, if anyone does happen to walk from the magazine towards the barricade, he will see nothing to excite his suspicion. The fuses are timed to burn for five minutes, which should be ample to allow me to make good my escape."

Placing the lamp upon the ground behind him, Claude drew the fuses from his waist-cloth and carefully put them in position some two feet apart, cautiously sweeping the ground clear of all grains of powder as he did so. Then he connected the train and the fuses with a handful of powder.

"The time has come for the explosion," he said almost breathlessly. "Now, there it goes."

Strive as he would, the hand which lifted the lamp shook dangerously, for, now that the critical moment had arrived, Claude's calmness had vanished and excitement had taken its place. Steadying himself with an effort, he brought the flickering flame close to the fuses and paused for a moment, glancing as if he were fascinated at the black train of powder which disappeared round the angle. Another movement and the flame licked round the end of one of the fuses. It crackled, spluttered, and half caught fire, only to become harmless as before. Another touch from the lamp, and, as if it had only been waiting for a little coaxing, the fuse began to burn at once, sending out a thick, stifling vapour. Then Claude's hand moved towards the second fuse, and he was about to ignite it when, swift as a panther, a dark figure sprang upon him.

Yes, while Claude had been intent upon his labours, indeed

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from the very moment when he had slipped from the defences, a native spy, who had cunningly gained tidings of his intentions, had followed him with the softness and stealth of a cat. Fear had almost kept him from descending the well, but hope of reward had spurred him on, and, flinging discretion to the winds, he had descended to the tunnel. There, with lynx-like eyes he had followed every movement, and, waiting only till all was in readiness, had thrown himself upon Claude, hoping to overcome him before he could apply a match to the train. With a wild shout of exultation he clasped Claude in his arms and flung him upon the ground. Then he felt hastily for a dagger with which to despatch his foe. But Claude was not to be so easily beaten. Freeing one hand, he grasped the weapon too, and struggled to throw his opponent. And all the while, as they tossed and panted from side to side, the smouldering fuse crept steadily towards the train of powder, threatening at any moment to set fire to it and bring palace and tunnel tumbling to the ground.

CHAPTER XVII

An Appalling Explosion

NOT since the early days of the mutiny, which now seemed so far away in the past, so eventful had the times been, never, in fact, in all his experience, had Claude Watson been in such imminent danger as now. Compared with the fierce mutineer who clasped him in his arms he was as a child, for the man was of unusual size, tall and gaunt, yet with lithe and sinewy limbs which were more than a match for those of the English youth.

In two points only did the Hindu compare unfavourably with Claude. Had his courage and determination been equal to his strength and size, our hero would have had little chance. But fear of the unknown, superstitious terror, had at first almost kept the mutineer from following; and even now that he had fallen upon his enemy in the dark tunnel leading to the magazine, a desire to hasten away, to get into the free open air again, filled his thoughts and made him struggle fiercely. Then, too, his eye had not failed to note the spluttering fuse, with the thick cloud of choking smoke, and the trail of black crystals below, reflecting the flames and sparkling in the darkness as it curled round the angle towards the piled-up barrels beyond.

"Yield!" shouted the man. "Yield, and save your life, for within a moment the train will fire. Yield, feringhee!"



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“CLAUDE GRASPED THE WRIST OF THE MUTINEER
JUST ABOVE HIS DAGGER”

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"Surrender yourself or die with me," gasped Claude in reply, his eyes shifting for one moment to the fuse and then returning to the face of his opponent. "Let go your hold and escape if you will. I will not hinder you. But if you will not, then die. I will cling to you till the explosion shakes the earth upon our heads."

With a quick movement of his hand Claude grasped the wrist of the mutineer just above his dagger.

"Now," he cried, "which shall it be? Yield yourself! Drop your weapon, and I promise you that you shall escape with me. Refuse, and you shall be blown to atoms."

For a moment or more the silence of the underground tunnel was unbroken save for the laboured breathing of the two combatants, and the faint spluttering of the burning fuse. A moment! It seemed an hour to Claude, so intense was his excitement. Gazing into the Hindu's eyes, which were fixed upon the fuse, he noticed that the fierce expression of a few seconds before had deserted them already, and that now a look of abject fear had taken its place. The man trembled and shook like a leaf, while the dagger fell from his nerveless fingers. Then, with his gaze still fixed upon the spluttering fuse, as if it fascinated him, he tore himself from Claude's hold and sprang backwards against the wall, where he crouched, unable to make any further movement, so great was his terror.

"It burns," he cried hoarsely. "See! It creeps closer to the train. Ha! That spark should have lit it, but the damp air smothered the flame."

Stretching out a lanky arm he pointed at the fuse, calling loudly to Claude to watch it.

"It dies out, sahib," he cried in piercing tones. "No!

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See, it flares up, and comes to life again. Hasten it! Kick the fuse into the train and let death come. Quick! I can bear this suspense no longer."

Seeing that Claude, who had already scrambled to his feet, took no notice of his words, but attempted to squeeze past him, the Hindu started from his position beside the wall and darted forward, his eyes blazing with the light of madness.

"The man is raving! The danger has unhinged his mind!" gasped Claude. "Back! Fly from the tunnel or I will shoot you."

Grasping him by the arm, Claude contrived, by dint of threats and the sight of his revolver, to cow the mutineer and lead him away. Then, once out of sight of the flickering fuse, they broke into a run, which brought them to the bottom of the well. There was no time for discussion, so, having done all that was possible for his late opponent, Claude grasped the rungs and swarmed up at his fastest pace. Arrived at the top, he took to his heels, and ran well into the open, so as to be away from any building that might be thrown to the ground by the shock of the explosion.

"This will do," he gasped at last, flinging himself upon a smooth patch of turf. "Now for the long-expected moment."

The suspense was more than trying; it was maddening. Second after second passed, and still the silence of the night remained unbroken except for the yelping of a stray cur in the distance and the patter of musketry.

Boom! Ah! The roar of a cannon placed in one of the enemy's batteries reverberated through the still air, and caused him to start. But a moment later, silence had again fallen upon Lucknow and its surroundings.

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"Failed! I have failed after all," groaned Claude. "The fuse has burnt out, and the train has not fired. But I will not be beaten. I'll climb down the well again."

He rose to his knees and would have sprung to his feet, when a hand was placed upon his shoulder to detain him, causing him to start with surprise. Another moment and his revolver would have been presented at the man who lay beside him, when the voice of the mutineer who had so recently attacked him caused him to lower his arm.

"Lie still, sahib," said the man earnestly. "The fuse has not failed, and were you to clamber to the tunnel again certain death would await you. Wait, therefore, sahib. A few seconds only will pass before the earth quakes and the magazine flashes into the air. Wait! You have done all that a brave man could, and as you have saved my life I will repay your kindness by keeping you from danger now. Look! I see smoke pouring from the well."

He pointed into the night, and by straining his eyes Claude fancied that he, too, could perceive a thin trail of vapour rising into the air. A second or two later he was sure of it, for the smoke billowed up in huge clouds.

"That looks as if the train had fired," he exclaimed. "Now for the explosion."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a huge spout of flame shot from the earth some two hundred yards away, illuminating the surroundings. Then a mighty, deafening roar shook the air, and as if razed by the motion of a magician's wand, the palace which had proved such a point of vantage to the mutineers collapsed like a pack of cards. An instant later the darkness of the night had covered the

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scene, while shouts and shrieks filled the air, to be drowned by exultant cheers from the defenders in the Residency. These, too, died down within a few minutes and Lucknow was itself again, except that the patter of musketry had ceased, for the mutineers were too terror-stricken to fire, while the English of the garrison, feeling sure that they were now secure from attack for a time, threw themselves down at their posts, and indulged in much-needed sleep.

"The deed is accomplished, and the sahib lives," said the Hindu at last, salaaming in the darkness. "Less than ten minutes ago I was a rebel, thirsting for your life. Now I am once more a follower of the Great White Queen, and a faithful slave of the sahib. A life for a life is a saying throughout the land. Then mine belongs to the sahib. Command me, even tell me to kill myself, and I will obey."

"But how is this?" Claude replied. "An enemy of mine ten minutes ago, and now my slave! How can it be? How can I be sure that you are to be trusted, and will not spring upon me at any moment?"

"You can but believe my word, sahib. Have you not saved my life? When madness had seized upon my mind in the tunnel below, did you not rescue me? Then how can you doubt my faith, when I tell you that with us a life is paid for with a life? Mine was forfeit, but you would not see me die. It is yours, therefore, until the debt is paid."

The Hindu salaamed low again, the earnestness of his tones proving his sincerity.

"Yes, sahib," he went on, "give the word and I will obey. When I followed you from the defences it was known to me that, once your task was accomplished, you proposed to escape

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from the city. If that is still your intention, allow me to guide you; otherwise the risk of discovery would be great. Fear not; I will not break the word which I have spoken. Together we will pass through the ranks of the mutineers to the open country beyond."

"And then?" asked Claude, who was bewildered by the turn which events had taken. "What do you propose to do?"

"The sahib will decide. With his permission I will still accompany him till his friends are reached."

"You faithfully promise to do all this?" demanded Claude sternly.

"I have already said so, sahib," the Hindu replied earnestly. "My word is passed to you, and if I break it may I be punished as I shall deserve."

"I will trust you then," said Claude. "But I will give you this warning. Should you show the slightest sign of treachery, or lead me into an ambush, I will shoot you like a dog. But there, you will be faithful, I feel assured. Now show me the way. I desire to pass out in the direction of Cawnpore."

"That cannot be, sahib," the Hindu answered promptly. "The English are massing in that direction. Even now they have crossed the river and are marching upon Lucknow; and to meet them thousands of the sepoys have collected. Their bivouacs cover miles of the country between this and the Ganges, and were you to pass safely through the pickets here, the patrols of horse outside would most certainly come upon you and ride you down. Be advised by me, sahib. Escape is open in the opposite direction, and as you cannot reach Cawnpore your way lies to Delhi, where your English com-

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rades keep watch over the city. From there the news you bring can be sent to the town you have mentioned."

"But I have friends there," replied Claude shortly. "Country, of course, comes first, and my private affairs must take second place. Still, if it is possible, I should like to make for Cawnpore, for I am terribly anxious."

"And suppose you are captured on the way, sahib?"

"I shall be killed," said Claude sternly. "Naturally I can expect no mercy from the mutineers."

"That is too true, sahib," the Hindu said calmly. "But it is not you alone who would suffer. What would become of the secret tidings which you bear? Surely the news would be lost to the English?"

"You are right, perfectly right," cried Claude, grasping the man's meaning in a moment. "I must not forget that my tidings are of the utmost value. Yes, if you say that the risk of a journey to Cawnpore is too great to be undertaken, then we must turn our faces towards Delhi."

"The sahib is wise," said the Hindu. "Your servant, Garru, will lead you. Is it your wish that we set out now?"

"Yes, at once. The sooner we are away the better."

"Then follow closely, sahib. If there is danger I will warn you, and should any of the mutineers approach be silent yourself. You speak our tongue with readiness, but a sharp man can detect a difference, and nowadays all men are wide awake to discover an enemy. Follow, then, and beware how you walk, for we must pass close by the place where the palace stood."

Turning upon his heel, the native waited only for Claude to

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spring to his feet and take a step towards him. Then he began to walk in the direction of the well, peering closely round as he did so. Two hundred yards farther on he came to a halt and touched Claude on the arm.

"See there, sahib," he whispered. "The earth gapes as if it had opened to swallow the whole of Lucknow. The palace has disappeared, and no doubt the stones of which it was built now fill the magazine and tunnel. It would have been a terrible death."

Garru shuddered as he recollected the narrow escape which he had so recently experienced, and stood there silently, lost in thought. "Yes, sahib," he said at last. "It would have been worse than any death I have ever imagined. And you it was who saved me from it. When madness had seized upon me, and I would have dashed at the fuse to toss it into the train of powder and hasten the explosion, you forced me back, and compelled me to return to the well. Truly you saved my life, and have placed me in your debt for ever. But come! The sight of that yawning cavern unmans me. I feel just as I did when I crept after you into the tunnel."

Turning abruptly Garru strode into the darkness, and followed closely by Claude, plunged into the net-work of houses which composed the city of Lucknow. At one moment they passed down a narrow alley strewn with broken weapons, and overshadowed by mighty palaces on either hand, and the next they were threading an almost impassable street, lined by native hovels and obstructed by numerous carts which, no doubt, formed part of the transport used by the mutineers. A light occasionally flashed from a window, or pierced a chink between two beams in a wall; but scarcely a sound was to

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be heard. Lucknow seemed to be deserted, and the natives appeared to have fled from it, leaving it to the plucky garrison sleeping in the Residency. But a hundred yards farther on the mystery was cleared up, for on rounding a corner Claude and his guide suddenly emerged into a wide open space in which some thousands of mutineers were collected.

"Back, sahib!" whispered Garru. "We are in the midst of the sepoy."

Both came to an abrupt halt, and crouched in the blackness, staring at the sea of heads which lay spread out before them. Indeed, Garru did not exaggerate when he stated that the whole native army was there.

"Fifty thousand and more are here, sahib," he said. "See; they are squatting upon the ground, and are packed as closely as is possible. Look away over there. The flaring light shows where the edge of the gathering reaches."

Gazing into the darkness Claude could see some dozen or more torches in the distance, and the light from these clearly showed the huge proportions of the mob.

"Yes, Garru," he whispered. "A great part of the Lucknow native army must be here. What are they doing? What has brought them to this place?"

"Hush, sahib," the Hindu said, tugging at his wrist to emphasize the warning. "Someone is about to speak. Let us listen to him."

At this moment Claude became aware of the fact that a group of men stood some twenty yards away on his right, and one of the torches being close at hand, and happening to flare up at that second, disclosed their identity. From their uniforms, their jewelled turbans, and their flashing tulwars there

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was little doubt that they were officers. One of the number had taken a pace to the front, and, holding his hand with outstretched fingers and palm towards the gathering of sepoy, motioned them to be silent.

"Brothers!" he cried. "You have met together hurriedly to-night, and have called us here to deal with this question. What troubles you? What keeps you from your batteries and from your loopholes? Consider that every minute's respite refreshes the hated feringhees. They sleep while you crouch here, and when you close with them again they will be stronger than ever. Be men! Do not let this explosion, and the destruction of a palace and a few hundred lives deter you. Come! What has caused you to forget the voices and commands of your leaders?"

The native officer finished speaking, and stood there in the uncertain light, gazing thoughtfully at the troops who squatted before him. But more than a minute passed before any of the sepoy attempted to answer him. At length, however, one of them, who seemed to have been chosen as leader by his comrades, rose to his feet, a guttural "Ah!" escaping from some thousands of lips as he did so.

"You ask what troubles us," he said in loud, clear tones. "It is the explosion. For the lives that are lost we care nothing, but we fear the future. These feringhee dogs fight like tigers, and are still harder to kill. Day and night we have poured shot and shell upon them. We have searched every house and every loophole with our bullets. Even the women's quarters and the hospital have had a full share. But still they fight on, and now, when, according to your words, they should have been captured and slain, fate comes to help

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them, and blows up our magazine. I say for all my comrades that the feringhees are more than men, and are too strong for us. Therefore let us leave the city and go to Delhi."

A loud murmur of approval burst from the gathered sepoy as he took his place, but a moment later it was hushed as another figure burst from amongst the group of officers and commenced to harangue them.

"Leave the Residency and all the feringhees to go free!" he shouted in loud tones, which Claude instantly recognized as those of the rebel general, Indoo Khan. "Fools! You are fools even to think of it. Listen to me, and I will tell you how the explosion came about. Fate had nothing to do with it, and until an hour ago none of the English garrison had even dreamed of such an event. A feringhee officer, who was a prisoner amongst us, contrived to escape from his cell, and hid in the palace. The guards who should have watched him, and who have already paid for their carelessness, reported that he had discovered a trap-door leading from his prison to the magazine. It is clear that the son of Sheitan crept amongst the barrels, and, waiting only for the searchers to retire, made a train and set it on fire. That explains this great explosion. Do you now insist on leaving? Will you go from Lucknow like a pack of beaten curs, leaving the feringhees to shout taunts and every insult after you? No! I say that you will not. You are too brave, too steadfast in your purpose to do so. Why, your brothers at Delhi, who are about to capture all the British there, and to whom I am about to ride, would refuse to meet you, to sit in the same house with you, if you failed now to complete the task you have undertaken. Return to your duty, men, and when the Residency falls, as it

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will within a few short days, I will give a bag of gold to the sepoy who captures this feringhee officer. Remember, a bag of gold for the son of Sheitan alive."

It was evident at once that Indoo Khan had changed the mood of the mutineers, for on his ceasing to speak they expressed their approval in loud shouts, while numbers sprang to their feet. These, however, sat down again as the first speaker stepped forward for the second time and prepared to address them.

"Let us get away while he engages their attention," whispered Claude in Garru's ear. "I know the officer who has just spoken, and I am that feringhee of whom he told the sepoys. Come away. I shall not feel safe until I have put miles between myself and that man."

"Follow me, then, sahib," Garru answered. "We are in the shadow, so drop on your knees and crawl along close to the wall. A few seconds will take us out of danger."

Suiting the action to the word, both instantly dropped on all-fours and crept rapidly away. Soon they were in the narrow street which had brought them to the meeting, and espying a turning out of this, they plunged into it without hesitation and took to their heels, knowing well that it was of the utmost importance to get well away before the meeting broke up, as then the neighbourhood would be flooded with men, each of whom would be an enemy.

"Hush, sahib, I hear a sound!" said Garru suddenly, taking Claude by the arm and pulling him into a doorway. "Listen! Now what do you hear?"

"It sounds like a horse kicking the ground," answered Claude after a few seconds' attention. "Yes, there it is again.

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We shall have to go carefully, for cavalry may be stationed close at hand."

"There are two, or at the most three horses, sahib," answered Garru promptly. "Perhaps they belong to the generals who are addressing the meeting, and are in charge of the syces."

"Then we'll push on," cried Claude, a sudden idea occurring to him. "Follow me this time, Garru, and if you see me run towards the horses do the same at once, for I've a notion that the journey to Delhi would be all the easier if we had mounts to carry us there."

"But, sahib, the danger," cried Garru, astonished at his daring.

"The danger? What danger? If the horses are to be had they will help us to escape from a position which is far from pleasant."

Stepping from the doorway Claude ran lightly along the street, followed closely by Garru, and did not pause till he came upon the cause of their temporary halt. Indeed, so dark was it in the narrow alley that but for the sudden sound of a stamping hoof before him he would have run into a group of three horses.

"There are three of them, as you said, Garru," he whispered. "Now where are the syces?"

"Where their masters are, sahib. They too have been shaken by the explosion, and by the sepoy's want of success. Seeing that the men had collected together, and that there were none likely to be tampering with the horses, they left them here, contenting themselves with tossing the reins over that hook."

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"An arrangement which suits us admirably," said Claude with a laugh. "Can you ride, Garru?"

"As well as I can walk, sahib."

"Then mount. Get hold of that spare horse and bring him along. Ready? Then off we go. Steady, man! We must not attempt to hurry, for the clatter of the hoofs would bring hundreds racing after us."

"Not so, sahib," exclaimed Garru, urging his horse to Claude's side. "I know this city by heart, and will lead the sahib by a lane that is choked with dust in the hot weather, and is impassable for mud when the rains are on. Here it is on our left. It is wide, so we can ride abreast."

"Then forward!" cried Claude, his spirits rising as he felt himself once more astride a horse. "Forward, and bad luck to the man who attempts to keep us from reaching Delhi."

Clapping their heels into the animals' ribs the two set their beasts into a canter, and finding that the hoofs made no noise whatever, but sank softly into the dust, were soon careering along at a mad gallop, which quickly brought them to the confines of the city.

"Halt! Who gallops there?" suddenly reached their ears. "Guards, turn out and help me."

"We are carrying despatches," answered Claude promptly. "They are of importance and we cannot stop."

"Then ride on, brothers," the sentry shouted. "Good luck and a grand gallop to you."

Without drawing rein Claude and his companion galloped on, the darkness fortunately hiding them from the sentry. The faintest streak of daylight would have ruined their plans, as it would have disclosed the suspicious fact that two

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scantily-clad natives bestrode the flying horses instead of properly-uniformed sepoy officers. However, the danger was past in a few moments, and long before the guard had awakened at the call of their comrade, and had grumblingly rubbed the sleep out of their eyes, the two horsemen were well out of gun-shot. Houses and trees, the tombs of once-powerful Indian rulers, and the tottering hovels of tillers of the soil were left behind, and soon the fugitives were in the open country, and feeling safe from pursuit.

"We'll pull up now and have a breather," cried Claude, shortening his reins. "Now dismount, Garru, and give the horses a rest. That's it. Let those girths out a couple of holes or more. It will ease their breathing, while we can tighten the straps again in a couple of seconds. By the way, what about food? I have a tremendous appetite."

"There will be no need to starve, sahib. Garru will see to the meals, and they shall be plentiful."

"That's good," cried Claude light-heartedly. "We'll wait five minutes and then mount again."

Squatting upon the ground he sat looking at a few twinkling lights which could be seen in the direction of Lucknow. Then both climbed into their saddles again, and set forward upon their long ride to Delhi, the old capital of Northern India.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Gallant Hodson

THANKS to the horses which had so providentially fallen into their hands, Claude and his recently-acquired native follower, Garru, quickly traversed the miles which stretched between Lucknow and the distant city of Delhi. A grand trunk road, broad and level, made travelling easy, while the fact that it was often raised upon an embankment for the purpose of keeping it free from flood during the rains, and that for the greater part it wound through open country, enabled them to obtain a clear view ahead, and so have timely warning of the approach of strangers.

Many times indeed they trotted past country carts, dragged along in the dust at the tails of a team of native oxen. But in no case were they interfered with, a shout of welcome or a cheery "good-day" being their only salute from the peasants. In the villages, however, it was different. While riding through one of rather large proportions the fugitives quickly found themselves in difficulties, as the street was filled with horsemen.

"Ride on, sahib, and leave me to answer," said Garru quickly. "It would not do to attempt to retire."

"What will you say when they ask who we are?" Claude demanded. "Remember that we are supposed to be native syces."

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"I know, sahib, and that I will tell them. Was not Indoo Khan the name of the rebel officer who was about to set out for Delhi?"

"Yes, Indoo Khan, now Rajah of Rowpoor," answered Claude. "Be careful. Here is one of their officers coming to speak with us. It's too late to fly, so we must make the most of the situation. I suppose we ought to salaam?"

"Yes, sahib. Raise both hands to your face and make a low salaam. I will answer all his questions."

A minute later a gaudily-dressed native officer rode up to the pair, accompanied by four sowars, while some dozen more divided, one-half halting in front and the other riding past and surrounding the party in rear.

"That shows that they are good soldiers and have had a thorough training," whispered Claude. "We are in a regular hornet's nest, and have only ourselves to thank for it. We ought never to have come near the village."

"Halt there!" cried the officer, drawing in his horse exactly opposite them, and scanning them closely. "Who are you, and where do you ride from? Those horses are too good to belong to peons, and besides, the saddles belong to the army. Come, who are you? Rascals you look, and it is more than likely that you are servants and spies to the feringhees."

As he spoke both Claude and Garru salaamed.

"We ride from Lucknow," answered the latter. "Our destination is Delhi, and these horses belong to our master."

"Ah! And who is he?" asked the officer suspiciously.

"His highness, the Rajah of Rowpoor," responded Garru glibly. "Indoo Khan, once general of the former rajah's

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forces, and now leader of many of the sepoy battalions fighting at Lucknow."

"The tale sounds a true one," murmured the officer, "but my orders are to stop all suspicious persons, and all who cannot be accounted for."

"But, sahib, you will not keep us," exclaimed Garru. "His highness has ordered us to ride through, and then rest the horses, so that they shall be in the best condition when he arrives, for he will have need of them. For that purpose we have pressed on."

"My commands are from Delhi itself," answered the officer. "I cannot let you proceed. You must wait here till his highness arrives. There. I want no entreaties. You will have a certain amount of liberty, but I warn you that you will be watched. Take my advice and live quietly till your master arrives."

Turning his horse, the officer gave a few directions to his sowars, and then rode off, leaving Claude and Garru surrounded by the troopers.

"We must put up with it then, comrade," cried the latter in a loud voice, so that all could hear. "His highness will be here within two days, and as we cannot push on, I for one shall pass the time in sleep, for we have ridden hard and far. Tell me, where shall we picket the horses, my friend?"

"At the end of the horse lines," the trooper whom he had questioned answered surlily. "You can draw forage there, and as you intend to sleep all your time away you will require no rations."

There was a shout of laughter at this sally, in which Claude

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and Garru readily joined. Then, dismounting, they led their horses to the end of a long string of animals, and, having removed the bits and saddles, picketed them securely. A few minutes sufficed to procure a supply of forage, and then, true to his word, Garru threw himself upon the ground, and, having rolled himself in a borrowed blanket, soon fell asleep.

"I suppose I'd better do the same, or at least make pretence to do so," said Claude. "I can see that all these beggars are watching us, so to discuss the matter now would increase suspicion. By George! supposing that rascal Indoo Khan arrived at this moment. It would be decidedly awkward."

The prospect of such an event was indeed sufficiently grave to trouble anyone, and it effectually drove sleep from Claude's eyes. He tossed uneasily from side to side, and ultimately sat up after an hour's interval, to find that a couple of sowars were sitting beside a fire a few yards away, intently watching him.

"They undoubtedly suspect us," said Claude to himself. "I'm afraid we're in a nasty predicament, which may be made ten times worse at any moment by the arrival of Indoo Khan. How that fellow Garru snores! One would think that there was no danger."

He gave expression to an exclamation of disgust, for it was annoying to discover that his companion was so little concerned. But a moment later his opinion was altered; the blanket which Garru had drawn closely over his head, as is the custom amongst the natives, opened slightly, and a portion of his face appeared.

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"Sleep, sahib," he whispered. "Lie down with your face close to mine and keep still for an hour. The guards will then cease to watch us, and we shall be able to speak. From the first I saw that they suspected us, and would keep us prisoners. Sleep then, sahib, for it is only by appearing settled and unconcerned that we can throw them off their guard."

"That's excellent advice," Claude whispered, taking good care at the same time that the sowars did not observe him.

Stretching his arms above his head he yawned loudly, and then wrapped himself in his blanket again, contriving, however, to have one small chink in the fold which covered his head, through which he could observe the men who sat by the fire. For more than an hour he lay absolutely still, and at the end of that period, when he peeped again at the guards, had the satisfaction of observing that their suspicions were allayed.

"They evidently think we are all right," he murmured. "They are busy preparing a meal, and now is the time for us to talk the matter over, Garru," he whispered. "Garru, are you asleep?"

"Nay, sahib," came the answer promptly. "I am awake, and awaiting your report on our guards."

"They are preparing their meal," replied Claude. "Evidently they think that everything is as it should be."

"And what of the other sowars, sahib? From my position I am unable to see in their direction without moving. The other end of the village is free, however."

"I've been carefully counting, Garru, and I find that there

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are not more than fifty horsemen. They, too, are preparing to eat, and have withdrawn to the entrance to the village, leaving two of their number to watch us, and two as horse pickets."

"Then we have only four of the sowars at this end, sahib," said Garru. "Perhaps it may happen that we shall attack them. But it would be even more risky than the attempt to leave Lucknow."

"Not more dangerous than to stay here," said Claude quickly. "You forget that Indoo Khan declared his intention of setting out for Delhi at once. He may arrive at any moment, and if he does we shall be discovered and shot. Under the circumstances it would be better to take the risk and bolt now. But hush! Someone is coming this way."

As he spoke the native sowars who had gathered at the far end of the village were seen to disperse, some twenty running to their horses, while the remainder seized their arms and examined the locks. Then the officer who had addressed Claude and his companion called loudly to his men.

"There is a cloud of dust on the road leading from Lucknow," he shouted. "To horse, those who have had the order. To horse at once, and prepare to ride out with me. The remainder will take up their posts at this end of the village, and prepare to cover our retreat should it prove that the *feringhees* are coming. Hurry, men, or they will be upon us before we are ready."

Hastily throwing saddles upon the animals, the sowars led them from the lines and flung themselves upon their backs. Then, at the word of their officer, they went galloping out

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of the village. The remainder at once separated, and lay down amongst the houses, leaving Claude and Garru with only two sowars to watch them.

"Now is our time," whispered the former. "We'll make a dash for the horses, and knock those fellows down if they interfere."

"But they are armed, sahib," whispered Garru, "and would shoot us down the instant we moved."

"Not if we separate and make a dash at them," answered Claude with decision. "You forget that I've still got my revolver, and am prepared to use it. Besides, think, man, of our position. That cloud of dust may very well be caused by Indoo Khan. Indeed it is more than likely that it is he."

"I had not thought of that, sahib," answered Garru with a start. "We must fly for our lives, for if the Rajah of Row-poor arrives to find us here, a swift fate will overtake us. Give the word, sahib, and I will aid you."

"Get ready then," whispered Claude. "The thing has to be done, and thinking will not help us. Now, you run for the man on the right. I'll take the bigger fellow on the left. Ready? Then at them!"

Throwing their blankets to the ground both sprang to their feet, and, separating instantly, ran directly towards the two sowars who had been told off as their guard. For a moment or two it seemed as though they would have the good fortune to take them unawares, for the troopers were seated upon a bank, gazing up the village street, their attention fixed upon their comrades, who could be seen slowly trotting along the trunk road in the direction of a dull-brown column of dust which hung above it some distance away.

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However, one of the men happened to look round for an instant to observe the prisoners and at once started to his feet in amazement.

“Quick! Rise, comrade!” he shouted. “These insolent peons are about to attack us. Get your sabre ready in case you miss them with your rifle. Now fire!”

Almost at the same instant the two weapons were raised to the shoulder and discharged. But the shout and the hurried directions of the man who had discovered the intention of the prisoners gave ample warning to Claude and his companion. No sooner, therefore, were the muskets levelled than each darted to one side, escaping the bullets easily. Then, before the smoke had cleared away, and long before either of the sowars had time to draw his tulwar, they were upon them, Claude treating the one whom he had singled out for attack in truly British fashion.

“Take that!” he shouted excitedly, running close in to the man and driving his clenched fist with all his force into the centre of his face. It was a terrible blow, for Claude was a young man who had taken no small pains to improve his muscles, and now desperation added strength to his arm. The sowar shot backwards as if struck by a hammer. His feet left the ground and kicked high into the air, while a second later his head came in contact with the bank behind him with a thud which jarred his lanky frame, and left him limp and unconscious.

“That’s one settled,” cried Claude with delight. “Now, how goes it with Garru?”

“Quick, sahib! Help me,” came at this moment from his companion, and, turning rapidly, Claude saw that Garru and

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the second sowar were clasped in one another's arms and were rolling upon the ground, each struggling desperately for the possession of the tulwar which the trooper carried thrust through the folds of the sash which encircled his waist.

"Help, sahib!" cried Garru again. "He is too strong for me. Quick, or he will choke me."

With one bound Claude reached the side of the combatants and threw himself upon one knee. Then, drawing the revolver, which had escaped discovery thanks to the fact that he had taken the precaution to conceal it in his loin-cloth, he thrust the muzzle without ceremony into the sowar's ear.

"Let go your hold!" he cried. "Cease your struggling on the instant, or I will pull the trigger and send the bullet through your head. There, lie still, and beware how you act, for if you even raise an arm to signal to your comrades I will shoot you."

Thoroughly cowed by the cold ring of steel which pressed against his ear, and realizing that circumstances were too strong for him, the sowar gave up the struggle at once. Then, lying flat upon his back, he watched Claude's movements with wide-open eyes which clearly betrayed his terror.

"Do not shoot, sahib," he wailed. "Spare me, for I have done you no harm. Had I known that one of the peons was an Englishman I would have released him. Sahib, I am a true soldier of the Great White Queen and of the Government."

"Silence! Do not waste your breath to tell me such tales," answered Claude sternly. "Remember, a movement on your

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part, or an attempt to shout, will be followed by instant death."

"I will be faithful, most noble sahib," the man whined, the corners of his mouth twitching with terror as he did so. "Trust me, I will not betray you."

"You had better not," replied Claude sternly. "Hillo! What is the matter, Garru?"

"The officer and his followers have joined with the strangers who were approaching, and all are galloping this way, sahib. What will become of us?"

There was no doubt that Garru was thoroughly unnerved by his recent struggle and by the danger in which he found himself. There he stood, undecided how to act and too timorous to take the only step which could offer safety. However, our hero's voice roused him instantly.

"What will become of us?" repeated Claude coolly. "I'll tell you plainly, Garru. We shall be tortured and killed. Do you care to wait for that? No. Then pull yourself together. Now, run to the horses, and saddle and bridle them. Quick! We haven't a moment to waste. I'll wait here beside this fellow till all is ready."

Encouraged by the coolness of the English sahib, the Hindu sprang instantly to obey, and running towards the horse lines, was soon engaged in liberating those which had already proved so useful. A moment sufficed to throw off the heel ropes, and the bridles slipped over the heads without the slightest difficulty. Close at hand were the saddles and bits, and before two minutes had passed both animals were prepared.

"That will do," shouted Claude. "Bring them here, and

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mount yourself. We'll do what is required in the way of buckling when we are clear away. Hurry, Garru, for those fellows posted at the top of the village have discovered that something unusual is happening."

That this was the case was evident, for, as he spoke, shouts resounded through the air, and the sowars who had taken post amongst the houses, so as to support their comrades in the event of the approaching party proving to be the enemy, could be seen running along the village street at their topmost speed, calling loudly to one another and brandishing their weapons above their heads.

"Ready?" asked Claude quietly as Garru brought the horses up.

"All is as you ordered, sahib," answered the Hindu.

"Then wait one moment while I disarm this fellow."

Stooping, Claude drew the tulwar from the sowar's sash and threw it over the bank. Then he picked up the musket and treated it in the same manner.

"Now we'll be off," he cried. "That's right. I'm safely in the saddle. Gallop! Give the horse his head."

With one active spring he vaulted into his seat, and digging his bare heels into the animal's flanks sent it racing down the street. And not a moment too soon, for many of the sowars were now close at hand, and, realizing in a moment that the two peons who had been detained were making their escape, levelled their muskets without hesitation and sent their bullets hurtling down the street.

Phit! Plug! A ball of lead struck the ground a dozen yards behind Claude, and ricochetting into the air hit the animal he was riding on the fore-leg. No real harm was

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done, fortunately for our hero, but, roused to frenzy by the blow, the horse reared high in the air, and stood there poised in the most dangerous position for fully half a minute. Then with a bound he plunged forward again, and, taking the bit firmly between his teeth, bolted as fast as his four legs would take him. And all the while the report of rifles rang out loudly, while bullets hissed and hummed about the ears of the fugitives. Not that Claude had time to take much notice of them, as it was almost more than he could do to retain his seat.

"Steady, boy!" he cried, bending low in the saddle and stretching out one hand to pat and smooth his horse's neck. "Steady! We've ample start of those fellows, so do not flurry. Keep all your strength and wind for later; you will have need of both."

His voice seemed to soothe the frightened animal, for after a few moments the bit clinked loosely between his teeth, and his ears went up into their natural position. Then he settled down into a steady, fast canter which soon took his rider well out of range of the sowars.

"Now, which way?" demanded Claude, riding up to Garru's side.

"The sahib knows," was the short rejoinder. "He has again saved his own life and that of his servant by his quickness and his bravery. Lead on where you will, sahib, and I will follow blindly, for where you ride will be to safety, even though it take us back through those men who are now shouting for our lives."

"Then straight for Delhi!" shouted Claude.

Elated by their success Claude and his companion drew

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close to each other, and, sitting well down in their saddles, went galloping along the great trunk road at a swinging pace which quickly outdistanced their pursuers. Soon bullets ceased to sing about their ears or clip through the air, while the dismounted sowars were left standing impotent and fuming in the centre of the village. But they were not to be allowed to ride away to freedom without a further attempt on the part of the mutineers to arrest them. By now the remaining sowars, together with some twenty other horsemen whom they had ridden out to meet, came clattering after them, kicking the thick dust high into the air.

"It must be Indoo Khan and his followers," cried Claude, turning in his saddle to gaze at them. "Very well. That knowledge will spur us into greater efforts if necessary; we should be in an ugly fix indeed if he were to capture us."

"He will not, sahib," answered Garru with assurance. "Remember this, my master. Until a few minutes ago our horses had been resting in the lines. They had eaten and drunk their fill two hours and more before. Now, therefore, they are fresh and full of strength, whereas the horses of our pursuers are blown with galloping. Let them shout and spur as they will, they will never catch us."

"What's that?" asked Claude suddenly, pointing directly ahead. "Can you see anything there, Garru?"

He stood in his stirrups, and, with one hand grasping the pommel to steady himself, looked eagerly ahead.

"I see more horsemen there," exclaimed Garru in frightened tones. "There must be thirty, sahib, and they ride to cut us off."

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"Perhaps," muttered Claude. "Suppose they are friends."

"Feringhees, sahib?"

"Yes, Englishmen."

"Then we are saved indeed, sahib. But I cannot believe it."

"I tell you they are Englishmen," shouted Claude excitedly.

"I can see their white helmets and faces. Hurrah! Gallop, boys!"

Standing as high as he possibly could, he waved his arm frantically above his head. Then he motioned to Garru to slacken his pace.

"Pull up," he said curtly. "The boys will be along here in a minute, and when they arrive we'll turn and teach those impudent sowars a lesson. There. Give the horse his head and let him breathe. He'll have to gallop harder in a few moments."

By now the cavalry which Claude had seen approaching from Delhi had proved to be a number of English troopers, and scarcely had the two fugitives drawn rein when some thirty horsemen came galloping down upon them. In front of the cavalcade, bestriding a magnificent charger, which he sat with perfect grace and ease, was an officer of some thirty years of age, sunburnt and weather-beaten, with clear-cut, handsome features which at that moment were lit up by excitement.

"Charge, boys!" he shouted, waving his sword. "Brush these rascals aside, and then throw yourselves upon the main body!"

For a moment he turned to glance at his men, and then, lowering the point of his sabre, came full tilt at Claude.

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"I say. Steady!" shouted the latter. "We're friends! Look out! You'll be running me through in a moment!"

With a touch of his heel Claude caused his horse to move suddenly to one side, and thereby escaped the charge of the horseman. The latter, hearing him cry out in English, tugged at his reins and pulled his charger on to his quarters.

"Well, that is a rum turn-out," he shouted, while a smile stole over his face. "I took you for a rascal of a mutineer, and find that you are an Englishman in disguise. What name please? And where do you come from?"

"Watson. Claude Watson, recently from Lucknow."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the officer. "Then you'll have heaps of news to give us. But, I say. Time presses and we must tackle those beggars. I'm Hodson. Hodson's Horse, you know. Will you stay here or trot on with us?"

"We'll accompany you, certainly," answered Claude eagerly. "There is a dusky gentleman behind there to whom I wish to pay my respects."

"Ho, ho! It's that way, is it?" laughed his new acquaintance. "Well, come along. Fall in there, boys. Trot! Gallop!"

Next minute Claude found himself riding back towards the village, beside the man whose fame had spread all over India. And no wonder too, for, now that he was so near at hand, Claude could not help but see that Captain Hodson was a dashing leader indeed. With a wave of his arm and a keen glance from his eyes he kept his troopers well in hand. Another wave, and those on either flank turned outwards, and spurring forward till a few feet in advance of the others, preserved that position as the force charged down upon the

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enemy. Soon, almost before Claude could have expected it, the opposing forces were within ear-shot, the mutineers for once showing a bold face. In front of them rode their leader, with Indoo Khan by his side, while their followers kept in close formation behind them.

"Indoo Khan, the rebel!" shouted Claude, almost carried away by his excitement.

For answer the Hindu stood in his stirrups and waved his tulwar above his head. Then, before a word could be exchanged, the English troopers and the sowars met with a crash.

"Charge! Cut right through them!" called out Captain Hodson.

"Remember Cawnpore!" shrieked Claude, gripping his revolver.

With sabres and tulwars clashing loudly and flashing in the air, the opposing forces were soon engaged in a *mêlée* at close quarters. Men dropped from their saddles, horses slipped and rolled upon the ground, while shrill cries and shouts arose. Then one of the sowars turned his horse's head, and, as if waiting for that signal, the remainder who were still alive fled from the contest. Not till then did Claude notice that a sabre had gashed his shoulder, and that blood was pouring down his arm. All his thoughts and his efforts had been engaged in a fruitless attempt to come to close quarters with Indoo Khan. But fortune had been against him. A rush of horsemen had separated the two, and now all that could be seen of the rebel leader from Rowpoor was his back, as he galloped madly away.

"I have missed him," gasped Claude. "The villain has escaped."

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“Then better luck next time, my lad,” exclaimed Captain Hodson, urging his horse towards him. “If he has got safely away this time you will catch him on another occasion. Now turn about, my lads. In fours there and trot. We are already dangerously far from our comrades.”

CHAPTER XIX

Delhi Assaulted

WE'VE a ride of about fifteen miles before us," said Captain Hodson, pulling in till he was close beside Claude. "Delhi lies dead ahead along this road, and we have only to follow our noses to get there. Can you stick to it for ten minutes longer? We can then pull up and look to our injuries."

"Certainly," said Claude, looking at his arm and realizing, though he would never have admitted it, that he was feeling decidedly queer. "Of course I can, Captain Hodson. Why should I not be able to do so?"

"Hum! I've no doubt you will, my lad," was the doubting rejoinder. "But the sooner you are bandaged the better, for you are losing a lot of blood and are getting decidedly white about the gills. Halt there!" he suddenly shouted. "Whatever the danger we must come to a stop, for our young friend here is fainting."

Stretching out his arm the gallant captain of horse placed it round Claude's waist, and held him firmly in his saddle, for his quick eye had detected the ghastly pallor which was even visible through the layer of colour with which our hero's face was disguised. Then he caught his reins with a sharp move-

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ment of his other hand, and gently, but with the necessary firmness, pulled in the horses. A minute later he had dismounted, bearing Claude in his arms, and had laid him full length upon the roadside.

"Fetch some water," he called to one of his troopers. "Now, another of you stand between him and the sun, so as to shield him from its heat and glare. That's it. Now, I want a strip from someone's turban."

He had scarcely given expression to his desires before his troopers had carried them out. One lithe horseman swung himself out of his saddle, and lifting the holster-flap produced a long flask, which he opened in a trice. A second, a burly giant who would have made an excellent guardsman, so tall and broad was he, quickly took up a position so that Claude's face and head were thrown into the shade. Meanwhile, a third trooper had snatched his helmet from his head, and with a snip from the blade of his knife had loosened the pugaree wound about it. Rip! The strip of white linen was torn from end to end, so as to make a bandage, and next moment the man was presenting one of the pieces to his officer.

"How's that, sir?" he asked.

"Capital! Capital! You ought to have been a doctor, Jones."

"I've seen a sight o' wounds, sir, I 'ave," was the answer.

"Then hold his arm up, my man. So. I can get at it now. Hold the end of the bandage while I adjust it."

"He's comin' round, sir, I think," suddenly exclaimed the owner of the flask, who had been liberally sprinkling the con-

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tents on Claude's face. "His eyelids blinked, and see how his chest 'eaved."

"Force his teeth open, then," cried Captain Hodson, "and pour some water down his throat."

The trooper did as he was instructed, and then waited to see what effect the treatment would have. That it was beneficial was soon evident; barely a minute passed before the colour returned to Claude's face, while his eyes opened dreamily. Then of a sudden he sat up with a jerk, and stared about him in bewilderment.

"Take the man on the right, Garru!" he murmured. "Now, together, let us rush at the beggars!"

He would have struggled to his feet, but Captain Hodson forced him to remain seated.

"There, lie quiet, my lad," he said kindly. "You've been knocked off your feet by the loss of blood and must take it easy. Keep still while we bandage the arm."

With practised fingers and a no mean knowledge of surgery, which he had picked up during his career as a soldier, the captain rapidly adjusted the strip of pugaree to Claude's arm. Then with the remaining portion he fashioned a sling which held the wrist firmly.

"That will put the matter right till we get to Delhi and see a doctor," he said cheerily. "How do you feel now?"

"Ever so much better," said Claude. "That drink of water has done wonders for me. Thank you, trooper, I'll have another turn at the flask."

"We must be moving on now," said Captain Hodson some

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five minutes later. "It's not that I fear those rascals we have just engaged; but there may be hundreds more in the vicinity. And though we are used to fighting with the odds against us, still we've no desire to find ourselves cut off from Delhi. Get into your saddles, my men. Now, my lad, do you think you can contrive to do the same?"

For answer Claude sprang nimbly to his feet, and clambered upon the charger which had formerly carried him.

"I'm fit for a long gallop," he cried gaily. "Give the word, Captain."

"Then, in fours, my men," shouted Hodson. "Forward!"

Once more the cavalcade set out along the great trunk road, Claude and the leader riding side by side. Before them, as far as the eye could reach, not a living being was visible, while behind, the village had been deserted by the enemy, who had evidently continued their flight in the direction of Lucknow.

"See what a dust they are throwing up," said Captain Hodson. "By the length of the cloud it is certain that those who got away first have galloped on without waiting for their less fortunate comrades. Well, let them go. We have given them a lesson which will last them a lifetime."

Pushing on at a steady pace, the patrol of horse soon arrived in the vicinity of the great city of Delhi. Then, striking away to the right, they galloped towards a lengthy elevation known as the "ridge", whereon the folds of a Union Jack could be distinctly discerned, flapping lazily in the tropical breeze.

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"That is a splendid sight," remarked the captain eagerly. "Just think of our position. Here are we with a few thousand men encamped before this big city, and though there are hosts of mutineers at hand they cannot turn us out. Not that they have made many serious attempts. Our boldness seems, in fact, to have cowed them, and we know from our spies that already the exultation of the Mogul leader and his followers has been changed to fear and misgiving. They boasted that they would drive the British from the country, but still we are here, steadfast and undismayed, only awaiting the arrival of more men and cannon to capture the city."

"When will the assault take place?" asked Claude eagerly. "It seems too great a task for the handful of troops here."

"There is no doubt that the difficulties are immense," was the answer; "but our very audacity will help us, and I am certain that within a month we shall capture the city. But here we are. Hop off, Watson, and come with me. Our saw-bones lives in that bell-tent over there."

He pointed to a stunted canvas shelter, and, offering Claude his arm, helped him to walk to it, for now that he was once more upon his feet, the latter's knees seemed to have lost their power, and threatened to collapse. Arrived at the door of the tent they looked in, to discover its owner seated in a long, roughly-constructed cane chair, and busily engaged in sketching a plan upon a leaf torn from his note-book.

"Another patient, Hodson?" he asked, looking up with a friendly smile. "We already have our hands full, I can assure you, for this inaction is causing the men to fall sick

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in great numbers. But it is nothing to the host of cases we had in the early days of the mutiny. Look at that. I've been amusing myself by drawing up plans for the attack upon Delhi. But, let me see to my patient."

Tossing the paper on one side, he bade Claude occupy his chair. Then, having called for a native orderly, he set to work to examine the arm. Half an hour later our hero had had his wound properly attended to and was sleeping in a tent near by. That evening he was feverish, and for three weeks he was incapable of any action. Indeed he kept his bed for the greater part of the time. When a month had passed, however, he was about again, and, though still weak after his illness, was ready for work.

"Every man is wanted," said his friend Captain Hodson. "The great attack is about to take place, and we cannot spare one of our number. How would you like to join my squadron? You would find it easier work when mounted."

"Nothing would please me more," said Claude eagerly. "But has the day for the assault actually been fixed?"

"Yes. To-morrow at early dawn it will take place. Our sappers have been working like Trojans, and to-night the bombardment will commence. Once a breach has been formed, the signal will be passed for the columns to assemble. Then, my lad, it will be a case of desperate fighting, and of victory as a reward."

Captain Hodson had stated the case truly, but in order that the reader may fully understand the position of affairs it will be as well to describe what had happened in the neighbour-

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hood of the ridge since the British force first occupied it. Then the numbers at the command of the general had been ridiculously small, and even now they could not rightly be described as otherwise. But they were all that could be spared; Sir John Lawrence had sent every available man to Delhi. In addition a siege train had been despatched, and with it the most able of engineer officers.

When they arrived at the "ridge", and looked out upon the stronghold of the mutineers, they found that the north front faced them; and to this they were compelled to give their undivided attention, for, the British force being so very small, to attempt an attack elsewhere would have been to separate the various assaulting columns, and run the grave risk of having each one in succession cut off and annihilated by huge forces of the enemy, before reserves could be brought to their aid.

The north front was, indeed, the only part of the city which we could hope to bombard, and that for the simple reason that it lay opposite the plateau and ridge to which our troops had so tenaciously held. Rebel sepoys were free to come and go from south, east, and west, at their will, and on more than one occasion they took advantage of this fact, and, creeping round to the British camp, fell upon it with fury. It was seldom, however, that the fighting was pressed home, and in every case the mutineers were driven helter-skelter back to their fortress.

From the River Jumna, which lay on the left of our camp, the Water Bastion stretched, forming, with the Cashmere

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Bastion and the Moree Bastion, the complete north front of the city. Each bastion was connected by a curtain wall, loop-holed for musketry, but not prepared for heavy cannon.

On September 7th our first battery was constructed under cover of night, and when morning dawned a truly gigantic task had been accomplished. The mutineers were astounded to discover a long line of earthworks confronting the Moree Bastion. All day long our mortars and guns played upon the wall, while elsewhere the busy sappers were at work constructing other batteries.

Thanks to scores of natives who had been roughly trained to the work, and who for a few rupees willingly toiled under a heavy fire, our lines of earthworks were rapidly completed and armed, each battery opening upon the city bastions as soon as sufficient gunners could be found to man the pieces.

For three whole days and nights the bombardment continued without cessation, and all the while the enemy replied with a heavy musketry fire upon the troops.

Standing to their guns, the British soldiers treated the bullets and shot which fell amongst them with contempt, and, undaunted by the loss which they suffered, kept staunchly at their work.

On September 13th there were two great breaches in the walls, and these, on being surveyed, were declared practicable. Then, at last, when the patience of our fine troops was almost exhausted, the orders for the assault were issued.

"Sit down and listen to them," said Captain Hodson that evening, coming to Claude's tent and taking a place beside

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the frail camp-table which stood in the centre. "There, I've a good light and can see the writing. Now, what arrangement has General Wilson made?"

"What part are the Horse to take in the attack?" interposed Claude eagerly.

"A small one only, I fear," was the answer. "To-morrow will be a day for the infantry. Ah! Here we are."

Lifting the paper so that the light of a flickering candle fell full upon it, Captain Hodson read the orders for the attack.

"There are to be five columns, you see," he said, running over the different headings again. "The first, under Nicholson, will consist of the 75th Foot, the 1st Fusiliers, and the 2nd Punjabees, and will rush the breach in the Cashmere Bastion. The second will be commanded by Jones, and will consist of the 8th Foot, the 2nd Fusiliers, and the 4th Sikhs. It will assault the breach in the Water Bastion. The third column, under Campbell, will be formed by the 52nd Foot, the Kumaon Battalion, and the 1st Punjabees. To it is assigned the task of rushing through the Cashmere Gate once it has been demolished. The fourth column will be commanded by Major Reid, and will be made up of a detachment of British, the Ghorkas, and part of the Cashmere contingent. It is to carry the suburb of Kishengunge, a battery near the Moree, and the Lahore Gate. Lastly, the fifth column, under Longfield, will be held in reserve. In all less than 5000 troops about to attack 100,000 at least, Well, Claude, what do you think of the general's arrangements?"

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"They sound excellent," replied our hero. "But what about the Horse? I do not see that we are mentioned."

"That is the case," replied his companion with a shrug. "Our duty will be to look on, and hold ourselves in readiness in case one of the columns should get into difficulties. The honour and glory of the assault falls to our comrades. But there is no reason why you should stick to the horse, my lad. Remember that yours is a roving commission. If I were in your shoes I would join one of the columns."

"There's nothing I'd like better," said Claude eagerly. "You see, since I escaped from Lucknow, in fact ever since I was first captured by that fellow Indoo Khan, I have heard nothing of my comrades. I am always on the look-out for news, and it may turn out that, by joining in the assault, I may run up against some sepoy who has come from Cawnpore. But I very much fear that Reg and my good friends have all been killed, and if that is the case my only wish is to lay hands upon Indoo Khan. He is the cause of our misfortunes to a very large extent, and he deserves punishment."

"Which he will get if he crosses your path," chimed in the captain with a smile. "I know you well by now, Claude, and I feel sure that you are not moved by feelings of revenge. The capture of this rebel general seems to be a matter of duty with you."

"It is," said Claude quietly, "and I will not rest till the task is accomplished. But about this assault. Which of the four columns can I join?"

"The third, commanded by my friend, Colonel Campbell.

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It is ordered to rush the Cashmere Gate, and will show you plenty of adventure. Come with me now and I will settle the matter for you."

On the following morning, while it was still dark, the three first columns left the camp and stole away in the gloom to take up their positions. An hour sufficed for that purpose, then all lay down, while the batteries pounded the bastion with their shot.

"Ten minutes more and we shall be at them," whispered a young officer who was close to Claude. "Look at those fellows. They are off to blow in the gate."

By now the day had dawned, so Claude could distinctly see a small party hastening across the open ground which led to the Cashmere Gate. It was composed of Lieutenants Home and Salkeld, of the Royal Engineers—a corps which earned for itself great distinction during the siege, by reason of the surprising gallantry of its members,—Sergeants Carmichael, Burgess, and Smith of the Sappers, and Havildar Madhoo, with seven native sappers to carry the powder. Trudging sturdily beside them, with bugle already in his hand, was Hawthorn, a lad of the 52nd, who was destined that day to earn undying fame. Careless of the fact that they were now clearly visible to the enemy, and that shot and shell had already commenced to hurtle about their heads, the gallant little band went steadily on to the gate. Before it was an outer palisade, but the port through it was open, and, instantly taking advantage of the fact, Lieutenant Home squeezed through, and, accompanied by four natives, each

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bearing a bag of powder, crossed to the main gateway by means of a few tottering baulks of timber which had once supported the drawbridge.

"They are at the gate now," cried Claude excitedly. "Look, there go the bags of powder, and just see what a crowd of mutineers are watching them!"

As he spoke, hosts of dusky bodies leant over the parapets which surmounted the gateway, while shrill cries arose. But scarcely a shot was fired, so astonished were the mutineers at the boldness of the enemy.

"There go the others," said Claude breathlessly. "Home and his native sappers have dropped safely into the ditch."

It was an intensely exciting moment, and all in the third column who were so situated as to be able to see what was happening looked on in silence. They felt that even to shout a word of encouragement might perhaps upset their comrades and ruin their hopes of success. Breathless, therefore, and filled with an intense longing to help, they looked on and saw Lieutenant Salkeld follow his brother officer, bearing a lighted port-fire in his hands. In the face of a murderous discharge of musketry he crossed the ditch and laid his bags of powder. Then he fell, desperately wounded, handing the fire to Sergeant Burgess as he did so. At that moment the latter was shot dead, and the port-fire went rolling upon the ground.

But there was another staunch-hearted man at hand. Bracing himself for the deed, Sergeant Carmichael squeezed through the port and ran across the bridge. A moment later he had

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grasped the torch and set fire to the fuse, only to fall mortally wounded as he did so. Close on his heels came Sergeant Smith, who, seeing that the fuse was spluttering, leapt into the ditch, where he joined his comrades, and where also Bugler Hawthorn quickly put in an appearance. A few seconds later there was a sharp explosion, and the Cashmere Gate flew in fragments from its hinges.

Hark! Hawthorn's bugle notes rang shrilly through the air, bidding the men advance, and in a moment, with a roar of delight, which showed how eager the soldiers were, the column went at the gate with a rush.

"Charge!" shouted the leader, racing in front with waving sword. "Send them flying, and follow them to the heart of the city!"

Joining in the mad cheering, and forgetting himself absolutely in the excitement of the moment, Claude dashed forward with the men, and before he could have believed it possible, was within the gate.

"Get together, my men!" the commander shouted. "Now, all together with a rush."

Excited though the men were, they were never for an instant out of hand, and, responding to their orders, massed together and bore down upon the enemy. But the explosion, and the havoc it had wrought, and, more than all, the desperate courage of the storming-party, had thoroughly unnerved the mutineers. Those who had survived the effects of the powder, and had escaped the bayonets of the attacking force, fled for their lives and were soon out of sight. The column then formed up afresh,

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and was at this moment joined by that under Nicholson. This small force had met with fierce resistance, but overcoming it, and careless of their heavy losses, had stormed the breach and had killed or put to flight all the sepoys in that neighbourhood.

“Now, my lads, we have more work before us,” cried Colonel Campbell, the leader of the column in which Claude was fighting. “Fifty file on the right will storm the cutchery and the church. The same number will rush the Water Bastion. Now, smartly, please.”

Scarcely had he given the order when the two small parties separated from the main body, which latter advanced on the Begum Bagh.

The column under Nicholson took the Rampart Road and soon seized the Moree Bastion and the Cabul Gate. Here it met with a check, and, in spite of desperate fighting, was unable to reach the Lahore Gate. Guns covered the advance, and swept the narrow lanes with grape, while each window, each parapet hid a mutineer armed with musket or rifle. Finally an unlucky shot struck Nicholson in the breast, and straightway the column retired on the Cabul Gate, bearing its dying leader.

Major Reid and the force at his disposal met with only partial success, and when evening came the city of Delhi still remained unconquered. Four-fifths was garrisoned by a frantic mob of shouting mutineers, while a fringe, consisting of the ramparts along the north front, together with adjacent buildings, was held by the British. Hastily they set to work to fortify their positions, and then breaking from their ranks the

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soldiers hunted the deserted houses. They came upon huge stores of spirit, and worn out by their desperate exertions, and feeling the need of stimulant, they gave way to their cravings and drank, forgetful of their dangerous position, forgetful of the mutineers who opposed them, and careless of the consequences of their mad folly. Indeed, had the sepoy but known it, they could have attacked that night or the following day and driven the British out. However, they took no action, and when the troops recovered from their drunken stupor it was to discover that every cask and every bottle containing liquor had been smashed by the general's order.

But to return to Claude. Sword in hand he dashed along beside the leader of the column.

"Steady, my lads," cried the colonel, as the head of the force emerged into a narrow lane. "They've a gun posted up there, and the houses on either side are filled with the enemy. We'll send forward a party to drive them out. The remainder will take cover."

As he spoke, a tiny party separated from the main body and, led by Lieutenant Bradshaw, rushed at the gun, Claude joining them. It was a most exciting moment. The tiny lane was filled with clouds of stifling smoke and dust, which almost hid the enemy from view. But as he dashed forward, Claude could discern some dusky figures at the farther end standing about a gun.

Flash! Bang! It sent its iron charge whistling through the air, but aimed so high that none of the British were hit. Next moment the combatants were engaged in a desperate

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hand-to-hand contest. Springing past the gun, Claude found himself opposed to a lanky sepoy, and at once dashed at him.

"Down with the rebels!" he shouted. "Remember Cawnpore!"

"Ah, son of Sheitan, receive that on your head!" was the fierce answer, while at the same instant the sponging-rod was whirled aloft, and descended with a whizz, missing Claude by barely an inch.

"And that for you!" cried Claude, springing in and thrusting with all his might.

"And that to avenge a brother," screamed a second native as Claude's first opponent fell to the ground. "This to kill you, dog of an Englishman!"

Picking up the sponging-rod he too whirled it overhead, and though Claude made desperate efforts to avoid it, and indeed broke the force of the blow with his sword, contrived to bring it down violently on his head. Next second Claude lay unconscious beneath the gun, and the column swept with a roar of exultation over him. Dust and smoke hid him from the searchers, so that when the British moved on, bearing their wounded, he was left helpless, a prey for the tulwar of the first mutineer who happened to catch sight of him.

Look! A lanky sowar, dressed in gaudy uniform and with turbaned head, creeps from a house near by. He snatches a glittering sabre from its sheath, and, looking about him to make sure that he is alone, creeps to the helpless figure beneath the gun. Will he kill the Englishman at once? No. He turns him gently upon his back and starts forward with a cry

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of gladness. Thrusting his long fingers beneath the tunic our hero wears, he feels anxiously for a heart-beat.

"The sahib lives," he whispers. "The sahib, Claude Watson, the hero of a hundred fights, and my honoured master, still breathes the breath of life."

Thrusting the tulwar into its sheath, he stoops and lifts the unconscious figure in his arms. Then he staggers across the street, pushes open a heavy door, and climbs a rickety flight of stairs. A moment later he enters a room in which are seated three native women, while in a far corner a young Hindu bends over a narrow bed, upon which lies the figure of a lad of his own age or thereabouts.

"What has happened, Ikand?" asks the Hindu, turning round. "Who is it you bear in your arms?"

"My master, your highness," is the quiet answer. "See, I found him half dead beneath the gun."

Scarcely had the words left his lips when all sprang to their feet with cries of astonishment, and, rushing forward, looked earnestly at Claude. Then they laid him beside his brother in the corner, and set to work to restore consciousness.

When Claude opened his eyes once more and looked about him, his astonishment was too great for words. Supporting his head upon her knee was Mrs. Heaton, while her two daughters bent sympathetically over him. There, too, standing at his feet, his boyish and prematurely-grave face lit up by a glad smile, was the Rajah of Rowpoor, the victim of Indoo Khan's rascality. Behind him stood Ikand, disguised as a cavalry sowar, and beside him a gigantic figure, evidently



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THE SOWAR CARRIES CLAUDE INTO A HOUSE

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a native swashbuckler by his dress, but undoubtedly the honest and stalwart Joe Jenkins.

“Stand aside and let me look at the old beggar,” came a voice from the corner, and when Claude gazed in that direction his heart leapt for joy, for there, wonder of wonders! was his brother Reg, pale and thin perhaps, and with one leg bandaged to a splint, but jovial good-hearted Reg without a doubt.

CHAPTER XX

The Reward of Treachery

WHAT can have happened? Am I dreaming? Or is it really a fact that my old friends are about me?" asked Claude in bewilderment, looking round him as if dazed. "Is that you, Reg, old boy?"

"Rather! Alive and well, and kicking I was about to say," replied his brother. "But, you see, I've smashed one leg, so have to take it easy just now. Just fancy your turning up! We thought you were dead long ago. The sight of your face has lifted a load from my mind."

"And yours from mine, old boy. But how is it that you have all got here? When those mutineers dragged me from the boat, and carried me away, I felt sure that you too must have been captured."

"And so we were," said Mrs. Heaton. "We drifted down the stream for twenty hours or more, a prey to the most terrible forebodings, for we imagined that the sepoys must have killed you instantly. Then we grounded at a bend, and a force of mutineers bore down upon us."

"And some precious hard work we gave them," burst in Joe Jenkins excitedly. "Bad luck to the fellers. We floored a dozen before they could capture us."

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"He says the truth," the young Rajah interposed. "Our friend made excellent use of his fists, and astonished the rebels. Indeed, he filled us all with amazement, for he had no weapon other than his fists, and who could have expected him to make such deadly use of them? My countrymen do not know this curious art of fighting with the hand clenched, and deem a man disarmed as a helpless captive. But to return to our adventure. In spite of fierce resistance we were all taken prisoners. Then we were bundled into an ox-cart, and after many days' march reached this city. How many times our lives have been threatened I scarcely like to state, but of this I am certain: had it not been that stringent orders had been sent to Delhi by Indoo Khan, not one of us would have survived. Of course he wished to gloat over his captives, and therefore caused us to be imprisoned in a cell in one of the palaces, where we might have been now had not Ikand fallen upon our guard one night and slain him. That done he released us, and, leading us stealthily through the streets, brought us to this house, where we have lived ever since. I myself and the memsahibs have remained carefully within hiding, but Ikand and the soldier, Joe Jenkins, have shown themselves, and have caused no suspicion, as many of the houses were occupied by rebellious sepoy, who, breaking from all discipline, defied their own officers, and lived where and how they liked."

"And what of you then, Reg?" asked Claude.

"Oh, I might just as well have been made of wax!" was the laughing answer. "The fact is, one of our guards, while coming up country, was insolent to Mrs. Heaton, and, of

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course, I wasn't going to allow that. I copied Joe's example, and gave the rascal one between the eyes which made him see a thousand stars. Then all his comrades rushed at me, and between them managed to break my leg. Ever since then I've been helpless, and should not be here now but for the devotion of my comrades.

"But what of yourself, Claude?" asked Mrs. Heaton. "We are dying to hear what adventures have befallen you."

"It's a long story, but you shall have it," said our hero, and straightway plunged into the narrative.

"Now," he said, when his tale was finished, springing to his feet and moving towards the window. "How are matters going for the British troops, and what are we to do? The firing seems to be confined to the ramparts along the north front. Surely our men have not retired?"

"They have," replied Ikand calmly. "For the moment, sahib, their headlong advance is checked, but it is only for a time. They are massing for the final assault, and, believe me, they will be successful. In a day or two they will pass this way again, and then we can join them."

"But supposing some mutineer observed your action when you carried me in?" Claude suddenly asked. "Surely that would lead to suspicion?"

A glance at the faces of those assembled in the room was sufficient answer; for all bore an anxious expression.

"By Jove! I never thought of that," exclaimed Reg. "We were all so glad to see you that we forgot about the rebels. But perhaps no one noticed the incident.

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"That is scarcely likely, sahib," said Ikand gravely. "I said nothing before, for fear of increasing the troubles of the memsahibs, but now I freely admit that there is great danger. Some rebel will have seen the blow which struck Claude sahib to the ground. Then, too, he will have watched as I carried his body to the house. Soon, no doubt, when the British are out of the way, his curiosity and lust for blood will overcome his prudence, and he will demand to see our prisoner."

"And then there will be trouble," said Claude quietly. "If you refuse to let him enter, his suspicions will be aroused, while if you admit him we shall all be discovered."

"It's a nasty look-out, I must admit," said Reg. "What can we do under the circumstances?"

"Why not fight our way back to the British lines?" said the Rajah eagerly. "Surely to die in that attempt would be better than to be taken here and killed like wild beasts in a cage."

"Wouldn't do," said Claude with decision. "There are too many rebels in the adjoining houses, and they would certainly shoot us all. No. I fancy I have a better plan. If this fellow really comes, let him be admitted. If he brings a friend, then ask him in too. That will allay the curiosity of others for a time."

"And what will you do with the men who come in?" asked the little Rajah earnestly. "Surely, at the first sight of this party, they will give the alarm, and we shall have a hundred swarming down upon us."

"They will not see us," said Claude shortly. "Joe has a fine big fist, and we will ask him to use it."

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"I'm yer man, sir!" exclaimed the latter eagerly. "Send twenty of them in and post me close beside the door. I give my word to silence all of them."

"Then the matter is settled," answered Claude. "We will remain here quietly till someone knocks. Then Ikand will answer the door, while Joe stands in the shadow behind it."

Sitting close together on the floor, Claude and his newly-found friends passed some hours in conversation, while Ikand took his station at the foot of the rickety ladder and waited there, expecting that some mutineer would come. But darkness fell and still they were undisturbed, the whole night passing without incident. The following afternoon, however, sounds were heard in the street below, and, on carefully peering through the latticed window, Claude saw some thirty native horsemen gathered there.

"This is the house, you said!" cried one of them, pointing to the building in which the party was concealed. "Now, what is your story again?"

"I say that I saw a trooper carry in a wounded white man," answered a sowar. "I thought nothing more of it till this morning, and then it occurred to me that it was strange. Had I seen the dog, my tulwar would have cleft his neck in twain within the minute. But this sowar carried him in tenderly. Surely that is strange! Remember, some prisoners escaped a week ago and have never been found."

"That is the case, comrade. It may prove that we have come across their haunt, and since you have discovered it, enter now and clear up what mystery remains."

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"Gladly would I do so," was the hesitating answer, "but this horse of mine is too restive to be left. Do you, therefore, knock and enter, for you are as curious as any of us."

"Pshaw! Do you think to frighten me?" the man replied angrily. "Hold these reins and wait."

Springing from his saddle, he strode towards the door, and knocked upon it heavily.

"Within there!" he cried. "Open; I wish to speak with you."

"What now? What do you wish?" asked Ikand, lifting the latch, and half-opening the door. "Enter if you desire to speak with us."

Thrusting his body through the narrow opening, the sowar advanced two or three paces, and then halted abruptly to accustom his eyes to the darkness, for Ikand had banged the door to and the narrow passage was hidden in dense obscurity.

"Which way now?" he demanded in wavering tones. "This place is as dark as the deepest pit, and I cannot see my hand before my face."

"Step forward two paces and you will come to the ladder," answered Ikand. "Then ascend, and when above you can have speech with us."

Almost immediately the jingle of a spur was heard, but before the foot touched the ground again there was a dull-sounding crash, followed by the clatter of a falling body.

"Fairly between the eyes," whispered Joe Jenkins with a chuckle. "I tell you, Ikand, an Englishman don't care much for this kind of game. Stand up square to a feller, and

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let him know that he's just got to look to himself is more our way. But here it's impossible, I reckon. Is he dead or only insensible?"

"You have stunned him, that is all. In an hour he will regain his senses. But I will bind his limbs and gag him now."

There was the sound of tearing linen as Ikand took the sowar's turban from his head and divided it into strips. Then he proceeded to lash his legs and hands together, completing the operation by thrusting a pad of cloth into the man's mouth.

"That will keep him quiet for a time," he said. "And now to settle with the others. Wait here while I go to Claude sahib."

Ascending the rickety steps, the faithful native entered the room above, and found Claude peering through the window.

"They are getting restless down below, Ikand," he said. "Here comes another sowar to bang at the door."

"Leave him to me, sahib," was the quick reply. "I will trick them so that they shall go away."

"Comrades below," he cried, imitating the voice of the sowar who had entered and who lay bound hand and foot below. "The white dog is here, but near to death. Draw away all of you, lest the noise of your coming in should be his end. To-morrow, when he is sufficiently recovered, he shall be handed over to you."

"And what of you?" shouted one of the sowars.

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"I will stay here, for if I do not, some other troop will ride this way and lay claim to him."

Apparently this satisfied the men below, for they turned, after a few moments' conversation, and rode away, leaving Claude and his friends to breathe more freely. Indeed that evening and the night which followed passed without disturbance, and it looked as though they would escape without further molestation. But early in the morning the troop of horse returned and drew rein in the street below.

"Open there!" shouted one of the sowars, banging upon the door. "We have waited long enough for the captive. Bring him down that we may kill him. Quick, comrade, for the sons of Sheitan are about to advance."

"Then we will keep them out," whispered Claude. "What arms have we, Ikand?"

"There are two muskets with ammunition, sahib. I have a tulwar, and his highness a dagger, while your revolver is in your belt."

"That will give us a fair chance to beat them off. Joe, you take one of the muskets, and the Rajah another. Ikand, stand ready to rush down with your tulwar. I'll take my station at the door, and will fire through it. Reg, you will lie still here with the ladies."

The order was promptly given, and quickly obeyed. Before a minute had passed the defenders were posted, the Rajah taking his station at the latticed window, while Claude and Joe Jenkins crept down the rickety stairs and lay down close to the door. A hasty search disclosed a couple of chinks, and

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instantly thrusting the muzzles of their weapons into them they lay there silently, waiting with fast-beating hearts for the attack to commence.

"Hi, in there!" shouted the sowar again, beating furiously upon the door. "Bring out your captive."

He waited for some two minutes, and then turned to his comrades.

"This is strange," he said suspiciously. "No answer is given, and yet friends in the neighbouring houses tell us that no one has left this dwelling. What can it mean?"

"That we are fools. That we have been tricked," burst in a trooper angrily. "Did I not declare to you last night, as we talked this matter over, that it was not the voice of our comrade which bade us wait till to-day. We are being played with of a certainty, and I advise that we beat in the door. Ho, there!" he shouted, striking the flimsy wood-work with the hilt of his tulwar, "if you are our comrade, open to us."

Silence only greeted his thunderous blows, Claude and Joe Jenkins carefully abstaining from any answer.

"Keep your hand on the latch," whispered the former, "or, better still, thrust something into it so as to jam it."

His comrade groped upon the floor until he came upon a suitable object, which he at once jammed into position.

"Right yer are, sir," he replied in a low voice. "That'll keep them rascals out. Mind! They're preparing to rush us."

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This was the case. Finding that no one took the trouble to reply to their demands, and feeling sure that they were the victims of treachery, the sowars ran at the door and battered it with the stocks of their muskets.

"Stand aside," shouted one of the number. "Here is a mass of brick and mortar which will crush it in."

Exerting all his strength, he stooped and lifted the object. Then poising it upon his shoulder, he stepped a pace or two forward, and was in the act of tossing it, when a loud report sounded in the air, and he fell backwards, the mass of brick tumbling upon him and crushing the life out of his body. An instant later the rattle of a volley was heard, and to Claude's astonishment and joy the sowars took to their heels, hotly pursued by a force of British troops who had suddenly and opportunely put in an appearance.

"Friends are here!" shouted Claude, going to the foot of the stairs. "We will join them and return when the fighting is done."

Dragging the door wide open, he and Joe Jenkins rushed out and joined the soldiers.

"Push on till you can secure a good and commanding position," cried an officer, "and then fortify it till you get further orders."

Hastily securing the musket and ammunition-pouch of the sowar who had been killed, Claude ran along the narrow street. On every side weapons were flashing from the house-tops and from the windows, but the British force soon put a stop to that. Separating into parties of a dozen, they

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stormed the hovels on either side and put the enemy to the bayonet.

When night fell, still more of the huge city of Delhi had been captured, while the mutineers were hurrying from it as fast as their legs could carry them. Thousands of desperate men, however, still remained, and these kept up an incessant fusillade.

Darkness having fallen, Claude and Joe Jenkins returned to their friends, and within an hour all were safely under canvas in the British camp, which still remained upon the ridge facing the northern ramparts.

Then our hero once more rejoined the troops, and for three days longer fought in the foremost ranks. At last, when the city was completely captured, he returned to the ridge to hear the tidings that the King of Delhi and his heirs had been brought in from a tomb to which they had escaped.

To tell the story at length would take up too much of our space, but it suffices to state that the gallant Hodson was to the fore again.

Riding into the country with a mere handful of troopers he cowed the flying sepoy by his presence, and actually took the fallen Mogul ruler from before their eyes. Then, hearing that his heirs were in hiding close at hand, he rode out again and forced them to surrender unconditionally. To bring them safely to the British camp was, however, a more difficult matter. Hosts of sepoy, with lowering looks and threatening aspect, followed the cart in which the princes rode. But the undaunted Hodson turned boldly upon them, and, sending

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his prisoners on under a small escort, forced the mutineers to retire.

How he did it, why two thousand and more cut-throats wavered and gave back before this gallant cavalry leader and his handful of men no one can say.

They retired grumbling and threatening till they reached an adjacent tomb, and filed into the courtyard. As if he knew not the meaning of fear, Hodson and a comrade followed, and actually smoked there in the presence of two thousand enemies. Then he ordered all to lay down their arms, and for an hour and more busied himself in collecting the weapons, not that he wanted them, but merely to gain time to get his captive princes to the camp. But it was all in vain. Discretion told him that it was time that he beat a retreat, and on reaching the cavalcade which he had sent on in advance, it was to find the cart with its tiny escort surrounded by an ever-increasing crowd of mutineers and budmashes from the city. It was obvious that all hope of taking the captives into the British camp was gone, and equally certain that the report of a rifle, the shout and rush of some fanatic, would send the crew of desperadoes headlong upon Hodson and his men, and then only disaster and massacre could have awaited them. But this gallant leader was no ordinary man. Cool to his finger-tips, sitting his horse with such grace and ease that there might have been no danger, he spurred his way through the mob, and ordered the driver of the cart to halt.

Then, drawing a pistol, he told in a loud voice of the

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atrocities committed by the prisoners, whose brutal acts had caused them to be execrated all over the civilized world. And when he concluded he executed the cowering princes before the eyes of their followers.

Then, wonderful to relate, he and his men rode on unmolested to the camp, leaving the sepoy's filled with amazement and fear, for this was an object lesson which told them clearly that the day of punishment and retribution had come.

"Hurrah! A column is to march towards Cawnpore," shouted Claude a day or two later, bursting into the tent occupied by his brother. "The country between the Jumna and the Ganges is to be cleared, and Hodson says that we may reach Cawnpore in time to take part in the relief of Lucknow. He says he'll take us with him."

"Us!" said Reg mournfully. "A lot of marching I could do with my leg in a splint! But good luck, Claude! You've seen a heap of fighting, and I'm glad you'll have another opportunity. Perhaps you'll have the luck to hit upon that fellow Indoo Khan, and then the little Rajah will rejoice."

"I shall indeed," remarked the prince gravely. "However, I have little fear but that he will be brought to book. Let him fly like the wind, but punishment will surely overtake him. Claude sahib, I, too, would like to go with this column."

No time was allowed to elapse, for it was known that thousands of sepoy's roamed the country and threatened the scattered British garrisons. So, waiting only to secure a scanty

The Reward of Treachery

commissariat train, the troops moved off and marched for Agra. Here the Europeans were closely beset, but the relieving force from Delhi, numbering two thousand nine hundred in all, fell upon the sepoy army and routed it, capturing huge stores of baggage and ammunition, besides many guns. At the end of October the troops reached Cawnpore and joined hands with their comrades.

"Have you heard the news, Claude?" asked Captain Hodson one evening, galloping up to his young friend. "Listen and I'll tell it to you. You know that Havelock was preparing to march on Lucknow weeks ago, but was forced to hold Cawnpore, as his force was far too small, and thousands of mutineers surrounded him. Well, Sir James Outram was ordered to join him, and reached his brother-in-arms on September 15th. By right he should have superseded him, but he was too fine a soldier to take the job of relieving Lucknow out of Havelock's hands, and therefore waived his rank, and joined as a civil commissioner. On September 19th the army started its march, crossing the Ganges by a temporary bridge. Then they fought their way to Lucknow. It was desperate work, but our boys did it, and finally burst their way into the Residency. Fancy the scene when they arrived!"

"Then Lucknow is relieved," cried Claude.

"Not yet, my lad," was the answer. "Havelock and Outram are there, and have reinforced the garrison; but they are too weak to fight their way out, and so we're going to relieve them. Think of that. Sir Colin Campbell is here,

A Hero of Lucknow

and has collected as many men as possible. We've British regiments, native contingents, and sailors under Peel. To-morrow we cross the river. We're in luck, don't you think?"

Early on the following day Sir Colin set his troops in motion, and pressing forward by forced marches, finally came in sight of Lucknow. Then commenced a series of big actions too intricate to attempt to describe. It suffices to say that Highlanders, linesmen, the gallant naval brigade, and the native contingents did brilliant work, the Sikhs being particularly noticeable amongst the last. Desperately the enemy strove to keep out the relieving force, but without avail. Indeed, what else could they expect but defeat from such men as these, from gunners who, not content with a respectable range, must needs drag their heavy cannon to within a yard of the walls and shatter them at one discharge? That was the work of gallant Peel and his tars. With the roar of a heavy cannonade filling the air, with bullets swishing in all directions, mines exploding, and buildings tumbling to the ground, in the midst of a scene of indescribable confusion, the relieving force and the garrison joined hands. Then promptly the Residency was evacuated, and before many hours were gone the British were marching on Cawnpore again, triumphant, and bearing sick and wounded, women and children, and all their valuable baggage with them.

Thereafter columns marched hither and thither, and for weeks desperate fighting took place. But the tide had turned. The day of the Great White Queen had come, and in due time

The Reward of Treachery

the mutiny was suppressed, and all who had taken an active part in it, and could be captured, were punished as they deserved.

Claude took his share in the relief of Lucknow and in subsequent engagements. Then, accompanied by the little Rajah, he marched upon Rowpoor. But there was no need for cannon or for troops; friendly shouts alone greeted them.

"They have had enough of rebellion, Claude sahib," said the Rajah. "Now that they have felt the blows of your gallant soldiers they are anxious to yield. But wait. To gain my pardon they must hunt down that treacherous general who first led them astray."

"Your Highness, I see something strange above the gateway," cried Ikand, shielding his eyes with his long, skinny hand. "See, it shows clear and white."

"I, too, can see it," answered Claude. "It is a placard stuck upon the masonry."

That this was the case a closer inspection proved. Riding up to the gates the trio were greeted with loud acclamations. Then, dismounting, Claude led the way to the ramparts above.

"Look!" cried the little Rajah, starting forward and pointing to a second placard. "Let us read what is written there. Ah, I see that my rebellious subjects have reformed, and have saved me the task of punishing their leader."

A glance at the writing proved this to be the case. Realizing their error, the inhabitants of Rowpoor had laid hands upon Indoo Khan the instant he returned as a fugitive, and

A Hero of Lucknow

had promptly executed him, thus relieving their rightful ruler of further trouble, and removing a dangerous enemy from the path of Claude Watson, known to all at Rowpoor as "A Hero of Lucknow".

THE END

"English boys owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Henty."—*Athenæum*.

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BY G. A. HENTY

(See page 4)

From WITH BULLER IN NATAL



BY G. A. HENTY

(See page 5)

G. A. HENTY

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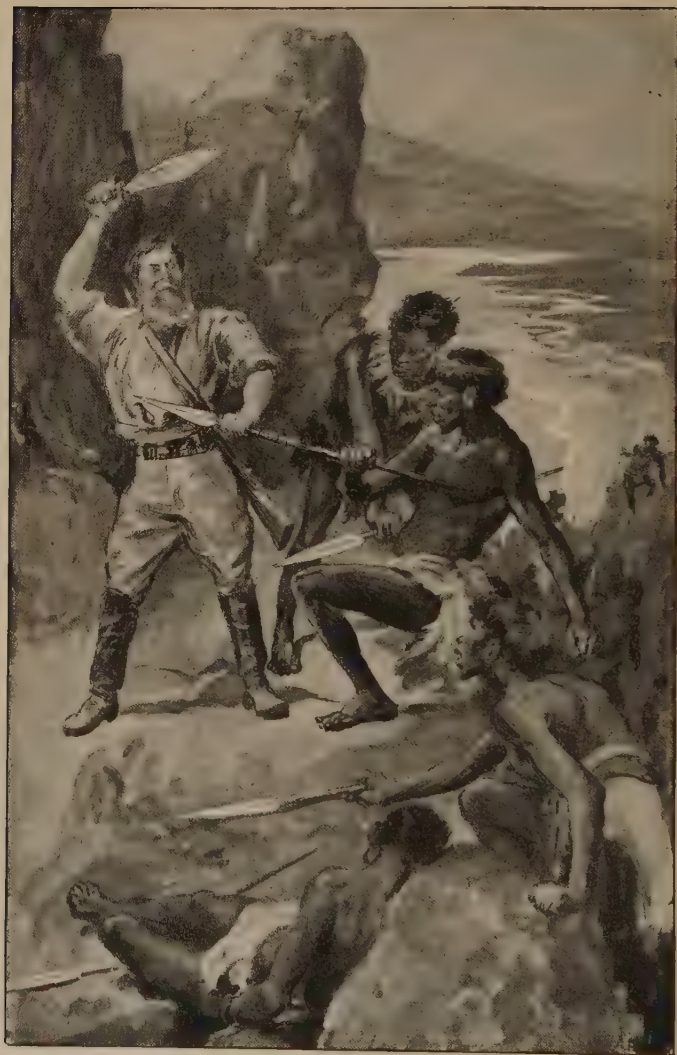
"Just the kind of book that a boy would delight in."—*Schoolmaster.*

From TOM BURNABY



BY HERBERT STRANG

(See page 11)



BY ERNEST GLANVILLE

(See page 11)

HERBERT STRANG

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lustrated by WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I. 6s.

Two school chums join an expedition into the unexplored reaches of the vast central forest which the Okapi inhabits. The search for the strange animal, however, serves merely as an excuse for the journey, and once the little party is afloat on the Congo they go whither fortune leads them, and many and exciting are their adventures in the unknown wilds.

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In this story the shy, dreamy, unselfish Dorothy Heriot comes to live with her great-aunt, the other Dorothy. This old lady is kind enough, but her discipline is unsympathetic. But the younger Dorothy's loving, unselfish nature wins upon the proud old lady, and the end is happiness.

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The Lovell family emigrate from England to New Mexico. Mr. Lovell is delicate and unfit for farming, but the three eldest girls take upon themselves the burden of working the ranch. They have adventures of a perilous kind, and the story of their mishaps and how they overcame them is throughout both exciting and stimulating.

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From THE FOUR MISS WHITTINGTONS



BY GERALDINE MOCKLER

(See page 23)

From CYNTHIA'S BONNET SHOP



BY ROSA MULHOLLAND

(See page 20)

GERALDINE MOCKLER

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"A genuine tale of adventure for girls, and girls will thoroughly enjoy it."—*Academy*.

—Three Girls on a Ranch: A Story of New Mexico. With 4 page Illustrations by W. E. WEBSTER. 2s. 6d.

The Lovell family emigrate from England to New Mexico, where they settle on a ranch. Mr. Lovell is delicate and unfit for farming, but the three eldest girls take upon themselves the burden of working the ranch. They have adventures of a perilous kind, and the story of their mishaps and how they overcame them is throughout both exciting and stimulating.

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It was matter for amazement when Ronald Hammersley fell in love with Kathy Fairclough, who was considered a blue-stocking, instead of with her younger sister Nell, whom Mrs. Hammersley had chosen for him. Why Mrs. Hammersley desired her wealthy stepson to marry one of Dr. Fairclough's penniless daughters was a secret. How the secret became known, and nearly wrecked the happiness of Kathy and Ronald, is told in the story. But all ends well, and to the sound of marriage bells.

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An orphaned family inherit a small property on the coast of Clare. The two youngest members of the party have some thrilling adventures in their western home. They encounter seals, smugglers, and a ghost, and lastly, by most startling means, they succeed in restoring their eldest brother to his rightful place as heir to the ancestral estates.

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Miriam's Ambition. With Illustrations. 2s. 6d.

Miriam's ambition is to make someone happy, and her endeavour carries with it a train of incident, solving a mystery which had thrown a shadow over several lives. A charming foil to her grave elder sister is to be found in Miss Babs, a small coquette of five, whose humorous child-talk is so attractive.

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(See page 31)



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